SUBJECTIVITY AND SOCIETY: MID-TWENTIETH-CENTURY RECONFIGURATIONS OF THE SELF, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1940-1970.

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Abstract

The primary historical focus of this thesis falls in the years between 1940 and 1970. My main area of interest lies in the individual subject and how that child, adolescent or adult functions in particular situations and most importantly, how my chosen African American writers have portrayed their male and female protagonists in various environments and circumstances. Each of the seven chapters of this thesis covers specific experiences: an emotional journey toward one's sexual orientation; a trans-national urban experience of homosexuality; 1950s suburbia and the socio-cultural issue of interracial relationships; historical and legal concepts of interraciality; rural poverty and childhood trauma; communal responsibility and child abuse; and maturation and intergenerational relationships. An emphasis upon family, community and environment are threads that run throughout the thesis. Accordingly, social, political and legal histories are engaged, as are environmental studies. Furthermore, queer, black feminist, trauma and gender theories are utilised along with sociological studies, child development and psychology. This research has enabled my close textual examination of each narrative so as to ascertain how each writer deals with the relationship between subject and society, thus, I argue how they offer differing viewpoints than the ones we find presented by traditional theories and criticism that predominantly comprise issues of race. Finally, the aim of this thesis is to propose alternative avenues of critical inquiry regarding the treatment of child development and individual trauma through individual readings of these mid-twentieth-century examples of autobiography, drama and novel.

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this thesis is to examine a series of African American authors and their respective texts through new modes of critical inquiry.[1] Thus, the aim is to explore the political, historical and cultural contexts in which literature is produced and how these influence narrative strategies and textual implications with regard to gender, sexuality, race and family representations. The historical periods upon which I concentrate, are predominantly between 1940 and 1970 with one exception, Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982). Written in the 1980s this text focuses on the 1950s. Alternatively, Alice Childress's play, *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White,* was written in 1966 but portrays the 1910s. Thus, despite slight variations, my concentration and interest illustrates the diversity of African American writing and ultimately, its aesthetic contribution to American literature. Therefore, my predominant focus is the textual *representations* of mid-twentieth-century African America. These texts negotiate individual subjectivity by demonstrating an inextricable link between individual selfhood, personal community and ethnic history. My chosen narratives depict this in an often innovative and sometimes interventionist manner. They offer a unique representation of society's peripheral characters, namely, the child, the homosexual, the mixed race person, the single parent and the elderly individual. The multiple struggles that are characterised are not merely between individual and society, but are more

[1] I originally conceived this thesis to include writing by Chester Himes, Amiri Baraka and Paule Marshall as well. Whilst I was interested in their exploration of homosexuality, interraciality and community respectively, as my thesis evolved to focus in a more concentrated manner upon issues of familiality and maturation, these three writers and their concerns emerged as superfluous and are therefore excluded from my final version.

intimately personal conflicts between a husband and wife, or parent and child that deal with sexual or racial identities, familial responsibilities and roles within the community.

My particular concern is with an emphasis upon childhood; that is, not just who you are but *how* you become it. By not just depicting respectable family paradigms but also non-traditional familial patterns, and by portraying the lives of those doubly, or even triply, marginalised in mainstream society as a result of gender, ethnicity, class, age or sexuality, these texts *collectively* help to legitimise our whole spectrum of individual perspectives and subjectivities. The whole gamut of subject positions is examined and this research is innovative in several ways. Foremost, my abiding preoccupation with the processes of maturation and acquiring selfhood across this range of texts is new. Furthermore, many textual examples such as the works by Alice Childress, Kristin Hunter, Audre Lorde and Ann Petry are critically underexamined or in the case of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, critical attention has tended to focus elsewhere.[2] I chose Audre Lorde's semi-autobiographical text to begin this thesis as it incorporates many of the issues that I examine throughout, namely, childhood, relationships within the family, maturation and sexuality in mid-twentieth-century American society. James Baldwin acts as an alternative male view with regard to writing homosexuality and Kristin Hunter performs the role of bringing the thesis full circle with familial issues, intergenerational relationships and questions regarding the responsibility of the African American community. In focusing upon both genders, different sexualities and multi-racial positionings, my study also rejects theoretical categorisation as solely feminist *or* post-

[2] For Alice Walker in particular, critical attention has focused upon racial issues in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, critical attention is related to racial and textual concerns. Hence I have decided to concentrate on the important issue of child development, trauma and the recovery of memory.

colonialist and instead seeks to cast its gaze across all of society. Therefore, the works of my proposed writers cannot be examined without some comprehension of prevailing literary themes in mid-twentieth-century African American literature.

Within the genre of the novel, four black male authors tended to dominate between 1945 and 1960. Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Chester Himes and Ralph Ellison have all been associated with the school of literary realism, with social issues being foremost in their respective narratives. As Barbara Christian explains, during my elected time frame, black women that were depicted in the narratives of the afore-mentioned four black male authors came 'painfully close to the stereotypes about the black woman projected by white southern literature'.[3] The imperative was therefore to not only expose and explain those cultural constructs and stereotypes but to demonstrate that my chosen black female authors utilise, subvert and invert those types in order to debunk white historical modes of negative representation. Thus they formulate portrayals of heterogeneous black femininity, family and community and the honest trials and tribulations of a developing black female identity.

What becomes apparent is that during the 1940s and 1950s it was necessary for the black woman writer to enlighten her audience regarding her own circumstances, contemplate her subjectivity, individuality and development, her correlation to men, children, community, times past, and society's values as she encountered them. It is these very issues that I intend to examine as such detailed analysis has not been hitherto undertaken with the combination of authors included in this thesis. Several writers of concern here have suffered from insufficient critical attention, especially considering

[3] Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 15.

their contemporary significance. Black female writers such as Ann Petry, Alice Childress and Kristin Hunter began to envisage the strength, intricacy and multiplicity of the experience of black women from their standpoint. The late nineteenth-century and the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s initially created a platform for black women's writing, however, the mid-twentieth-century literary foundation laid by the above black female authors, formulated an innovative platform for ensuing writers such as Audre Lorde, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison.

The literary characteristics that unite the black women's writing in this thesis tend to challenge those nineteenth-century and Harlem Renaissance images of the 'Tragic Mulatta', 'Mammy' and 'Jezebel' by interchanging and substituting them with an array of physical and psychological types; often blurring and blending such prejudiced and negative representations through their literary characters and protagonists. The relationship between the sexes is also an imperative issue with which these female writers contend, as their narratives often scrutinise societal forces and implications for marriage and the family. Black women characters are therefore presented as conscious beings with hopes and desires, rather than two-dimensional creatures and they are not absolute stereotypes,

> for stereotype is the very opposite of humanness; stereotype, whether positive or negative is a byproduct of racism, is one of the vehicles through which racism tries to reduce the human being to a nonhuman level.[4]

[4] Christian, ibid., 16.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One, on Audre Lorde, sets in motion an investigation into the realms of black women's life writing and black female self-awareness with *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* (1982). This 'biomythography' incorporates elements of migration, maternal ancestry, identity and sexuality amid the racial segregation and political paranoia of the 1950s McCarthy era and introduces the important concept (one that will inform later sections) of how the personal and the political are essentially indissoluble. This text introduces the notion not only of autobiography, childhood and familial relations but also of individual development with regard to the search for one's ethnic 'self' and recognition and acknowledgment of one's sexuality with both black and white partners. My main purpose is to juxtapose the negative socio-political position of black women and men at this moment in history with queer theory in order to textually demonstrate how Lorde resists established stereotypes and re-writes the sexual self. Thus Lorde re-creates an innovative lesbian narrative that purposefully blurs the boundaries between history, politics, ethnicity and sexuality. Lorde parallels the personal with the political; thus, I argue, she illustrates her journey as equally important to the ongoing socio-historical events of the American nation. Most critical works on Lorde predominantly consider the racial, textual and gendered nature of *Zami*. Therefore, I will utilise a new lens and historicise this lesbian text so as to re-position both text and author within white American cultural history.

Chapter Two continues the subject of homosexuality and corresponding societal attitudes. However, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) portrays 'white' homosexuality and differing cultural stances by combining American and French culture. Baldwin purposefully follows Lorde as a unique comparison of two texts hitherto not compared within the genre of gay literature. *Giovanni's Room* depicts homosexuality and heterosexuality and the choices that an individual makes according to parental and social expectations with tragic consequences. Thus, Baldwin critiques a mid-twentieth-century heterosexist society that has constructed a heterosexual masculinity, a culturally created gender identity that has been influenced by the historical emergence of gay identities. Therefore, along with *Another Country* (1962), Baldwin's narratives question the extent to which this desire to register sexual identities is actually another form of homophobia. Baldwin writes from a black male perspective about characters living in an often restrictive cityscape. Again, with the aid of queer theory, but more innovatively, environmental studies with elements of cultural geography, I intend to demonstrate how Baldwin juxtaposes a psychological landscape with the physical cityscape in order to examine the complexities of sexuality. Furthermore, in *Another Country*, the emphasis lies more on the socio-political and racial lives of its various characters and, in connection with several ensuing chapters in this thesis, introduces the complex nature of interracial relationships. Baldwin depicts the negative implications of a relationship between a black man and white woman and yet concludes with future prospects for a white man and black woman. Sexuality, place and time and consequently history are paramount lenses through which to analyse Baldwin's two novels and thus highlight their respective importance.

Chapter Three and Ann Petry's *The Narrows* details the lives and love affair of a black man and a wealthy married white woman amid a 1950s suburban landscape, with an equally destructive conclusion for the black male character as in *Another Country*. The setting for Petry's interracial lovers differs from Baldwin's portrayal of the stark cityscape of New York; however, both texts are similar in how both authors highlight white society's prejudiced attitude toward this particular colour combination. Petry introduces unvoiced legacies of slavery with regard to black masculinity, an issue that is comprehensively portrayed and juxtaposed with several variations of unconventional family units; the latter being an essential thread throughout this thesis. *The Narrows* in particular, challenges notions of black maleness and stereotypes and details a heterogeneous community of African American individuals so as to emphasise this point. I will examine the history of black female stereotypes in order to demonstrate how Petry confounds such typecasting regarding 'black' as opposed to 'white' systems of morality in mid-twentieth-century America. This novel depicts the downfall of the male protagonist as a result of media representations among others; thus, it is essential to consider the role of tabloid portrayal regarding male blackness in parallel to the cultural and prejudicial atmosphere of the time. Therefore, my examination of the cultural mind-set regarding colour, class consciousness and the 'American Dream', proffers a new and different view of a critically undervalued text.

Chapter Four's text is purposefully positioned after Petry's novel so as to offer an alternative interracial perspective. Alice Childress's play, *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White*, depicts the relationship between a black woman and a white man in 1918 South Carolina. As a result of the location and era, I look at poignant legal

cases and repercussions for interethnic couples alongside the implications of what Childress describes as anti-woman laws upon individual female characters in the play. Considering Childress penned this play in the early 1960s and such relationships were still considered as socially unacceptable, the irony cannot be lost as to the historical positioning of her characters' experiences. This play illustrates the development of black female consciousness and socio-cultural awareness regarding ethnicity, thus making it a subtly political play that, although critically well received at the time, has never been well written about. This chapter will examine individual relations between the black female characters, between black and white women, as well as between the main interracial couple. The importance is to re-establish this play in the critical eye so as to make use of its historical and political significance within the discipline of theatre. In addition, from a twenty-first-century perspective, the importance of this chapter is to illustrate this play's potential concerning the preservation and endorsement of a positive black female identity.

Chapter Five continues the thread of black female awareness, subjectivity and community but more importantly, introduces the integral theme of 'family' with Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland.* As with *Wedding Band*, Walker's novel depicts the pre-civil rights South; however, it is rural folk who are the main protagonists. To some extent, Childress's play depicts relations between mothers and sons; however, Walker expands upon this theme as her main preoccupation lies within the portrayal of intergenerational familial relationships. *Grange Copeland* demonstrates the firm need for family unity through a grandparent/grandchild union. As with all the texts selected for this thesis, race is an integral issue, however, all my chosen narratives equally bear

alternative and new examination. Therefore, rather than consider this narrative through a purely racial lens as does most critical work, I choose instead to view the psychological impact upon the young female character, Ruth Copeland. I intend to show that Walker frankly demonstrates childhood trauma and insecurity, but that she also stresses the potential for positive regeneration. I intend to examine the relationships between fathers and sons, and fathers and daughters in order to ascertain how Walker depicts such relationships with their accompanying trauma, healing and recovery of memory. Thus, with the aid of black feminism, trauma theory and psychoanalysis, I examine the issue of maturation and the emotional and mental repercussions for the adult individual.

Chapter Six and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* more specifically develops the theme of childhood trauma with the narrative portrayal and implications of sexual abuse. Racial history and class clash in a narrative that I believe crosses the boundaries of colour, because the story is narrated by a child and offers a unique view into the traumatised mind of a pre-adolescent girl. Thus, this chapter will examine and answer the question: What happens to a 'self' once the unimaginable occurs? Morrison uses a poignant cultural signifier of the 1950s, namely, Shirley Temple, and culturally positions this within a narrative about young black girls. I argue that Morrison successfully relocates the black female as the central voice in her fiction and challenges the reader to reconsider the impact of culturally prescribed notions of beauty through the eyes of younger members of a black community. With the use of psychoanalysis, but more particularly theories of childhood development, I argue that this childlike narration is an act of didactic reversal; the child will teach and inform the adult reader, Morrison unreservedly demanding that we readily go along wherever the child will guide us.

Chapter Seven examines a comparatively unknown text by a relatively renowned author and activist of the 1960s – Kristin Hunter Lattany. Despite winning many awards and receiving positive reviews for her work, Hunter ironically remains a peripheral figure in the black literary canon. Her first novel, *God Bless the Child* details the childhood and maturation of a black girl who lives with her working single mother and widowed grandmother. Thus this text embodies a variety of issues pertaining to the black family, mothers and daughters – as seen in *Zami* – but more especially the socio-economic effect of living in a poor community when one has strong aspirations to transcend such an environment. Through the deployment of black feminist theory, sociological and family studies, I argue that along with authors such as Alice Walker, Alice Childress and Ann Petry, Kristin Hunter demonstrates the necessity to identify with the past with the purpose of creating a new and affirmative future. These black female authors contemporaneously formulate a potential and positive black self-representation where there has previously been a void and illustrate not only evident African American features in their writing but also subtle differences parallel to mid-twentieth-century American cultural and political history.

In critically examining the texts chosen for this thesis, their cultural contact and subsequent representation of character, I seek to address the following three over-arching questions:

1. In what alternative ways do African American life-writing and fictional narratives, which were written in or represent the period 1940-1970, articulate sexuality, and same-sex relationships against the effect of social/political/cultural discourses?

2. In what manner, and with what consequence, do these authors enable the emergence of stories of interracial, marital and intergenerational relationships regarding legal and social issues?

3. In what ways have childhood, maturation, traumatic and often sexualised experiences been inscribed and framed in fiction by African American female writers in the mid-twentieth-century?

In exploring these ideas and through close textual analysis my aim is to argue and demonstrate that my chosen authors alter the way in which the self and subjectivity can be discerned. These writers offer pioneering ways of viewing personal identity, family and community through their denial of historicised stereotype and traditional cultural convictions. Thus, they change the face of mid-twentieth-century expectations as to the lives of African American individuals.

CHAPTER ONE: AUDRE LORDE (1934 – 1992)

Zami: A New Spelling of My Name.

Lesbian Experiences – Maternal Ancestry and Historical Autobiography.

Figure 1. The Hudson River, Harlem New York – Audre Lorde's mother's favourite place (*Zami*, 13). Photograph taken by the author, 2007.

Introduction

Audre Lorde, 'black lesbian feminist warrior poet', was born in New York City in 1934 of West Indian parents.[5] Lorde had worked as a librarian and then a lecturer in creative writing before her first collection of poems, *The First Cities*, was published in 1970.[6] Lorde died of cancer in 1992. Her final text, *Zami: A New Spelling Of My Name*, is described by the author as a 'Biomythography'[7], suggesting that we should expect an amalgamation of autobiography, myth and geographically placed 'herstory'; Lorde creating 'a new genre'.[8] Correspondingly, Claudine Raynaud states that *Zami* is a 'biography of the mythic self' and continues this description by stating that any narrative 'authenticity' 'has to be redefined in the context of myth'.[9] However, I intend to examine *Zami* through a historical lens, positioning Lorde's childhood, adolescence and sexual experiences in parallel to her socio-political reality because *this* amalgamation finally acts as a potential and alternative female means of challenging patriarchal epistemological thought. Lorde's parallel focus on the personal and the political re-positions the Black lesbian but also figures her own corporal maturation alongside and within the wider issue of body politics and American cultural history.[10] Lorde's personal journey of self-discovery is one that will eventually fill the socio-political spaces created

[5] Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 100.
[6] Tate, ibid.
[7] Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling Of My Name* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1982). Hereafter, page numbers cited in the text.
[8] Alexis De Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2006), 314.
[9] Claudine Raynaud, 'A Nutmeg Nestled Inside Its Covering of Mace: Audre Lorde's *Zami*', in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*, eds., Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), 221.
[10] In this particular chapter, I capitalise 'Black' so as to pay tribute to, and maintain, Lorde's personal elevation of the word and colour. See page 25 and footnote 32.

by a Western white culture that makes invisible those who fail to function and fit into 'normal' society. Thus *Zami's* positive portrayal of Blackness, lesbianism and womanhood become inseparable from Lorde's narrative exposure of racist and bigoted attitudes. As Barbara Christian argues, the 'connotation of the word *lesbian*…when seen in its social context, seems to…be critical'.[11] In a similar vein, Margaret Kissam Morris suggests that 'embodying oneself in the text as a means of political critique is a powerful critical tool'.[12] However, articles such as Morris's and Raynaud's tend toward textual analysis and Lorde's specific use of the body and myth within the text; they do not focus upon social realities, and hence the intention of this chapter is to fill this critical gap.[13] By employing elements of Black feminism, queer theory and social historicism in my approach to the text, what becomes manifest is how a subtle didacticism is imparted by Lorde; we can learn from Lorde's very survival a better way of considering the world and those we live alongside. Lorde's experiences are central to *Zami* as they connect her to other women and *their* experience. Barbara DiBernard describes Lorde's narrative as a *Kunstlerroman*[14], a story of development of the author/artist that acknowledges all women of every race, class or sexual orientation. *Zami* is a text that successfully conveys wisdom, Lorde declaring that 'the notion of difference' is a 'dynamic human force'.[15]

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[11] Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 189.
[12] Margaret Kissam Morris, 'Audre Lorde: Textual Authority and the Embodied Self', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 23 (2002), 168-188 (182).
[13] Other articles that choose to concentrate on other relevant issues apart from the socio-political are Elizabeth Alexander's 'Coming out Blackened and Whole' (1994), Kara Provost's 'Becoming Afrekete' (1995) and AnnLouise Keating's 'Our Shattered Faces Whole' (1992), all of which will be mentioned in this chapter.
[14] Barbara DiBernard, 'Zami: A Portrait of an Artist as a Black Lesbian', *The Kenyon Review*, 13 (1991), 195-213 (195).
[15] Audre Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action', in *Sister Outsider* (Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press, 1984), 45.

From the outset, Audre Lorde illustrates how Black women have been portrayed and stereotyped as 'other'. Lorde's own mother, Linda, exemplifies the gendered, racial and financial struggles of the Black (Grenadian) female immigrant in America, and yet Lorde differentiates between women from Grenada, Barbados and Africa, thus highlighting the necessity to see racial heterogeneity. Linda is part of an old tradition, of island superstition, but also integral to this is a cultural union with nature, especially the sea. When time allows a visit to the Harlem River at 142nd Street, Linda softens, and the harshness of her existence is washed away. In Lorde's *Zami*, traditional feminine images of elemental water and earth becomes united with the portrayal of female same-sex desire. This is seen most poignantly later when Lorde meets Afrekete (248-249). By contrast, as we shall see, James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* are novels that depict enclosing and suffocating spaces, and their particular portrayal of homosexual relationships are represented through grey, harsh environments and phallocentric cityscapes. Whereas for Lorde, despite the damaging secrecy intrinsic to her early years, the traditional knowledge of a Black *female* heritage eventually informs Lorde's developing sexuality and identity as a woman. Anna Wilson describes *Zami* as a 'valuable entry in a now discarded discourse…in lesbian feminist accounts' and acts as an exemplar of a text that has 'been read into the past'.[16] Nevertheless, Wilson correctly concludes that 'Lorde's text exists in a multiplicity of relations to genres and to institutional structures of criticism'[17], and thus is deserving of a fresh critical approach.

Matrilineal Heritage

[16] Anna Wilson, *Persuasive Fiction: Feminist Narrative and Critical Myth* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001), 106.
[17] Wilson, ibid., 111.

Linda, the ancestral Black mother, is part of a wider Grenadian female heritage. Her island home of Carriacou (13) carries a mythology of its own; it does not appear on a map (14). This is a 'magical' place of learned female powers, of mutual respect and love between women who retain control over their everyday lives. The powerful triad of grandmother, mother and daughter is depicted through Linda's 'root-woman grandmother' Ma-Mariah and Ma-Liz, Linda's mother. Chinosole describes this triptych as a structure that allows 'a complex and fluid self-definition' that accommodates a 'multiplicity of identities'.[18] However, Chinosole suggests that this matrilineal narrative serves as a purely mythical 'construct that frames past, present and future selves'[19], which again, denies the austere actualities of Linda's and Audre Lorde's lives. There does appear to be a contradiction when Chinosole later suggests that on 'taking a closer look at *Zami*' its central theme 'pivots around [Lorde's] relationship to her mother – her mother's ancestry…and survival techniques'.[20] Thus, 'traditional' must adapt to the contemporary imperative to be street-wise and yet the sense of the interwoven lives of the island women appears to unravel in the alien environment of the city. Their 'strength and beauty' becomes buried beneath the banality of everyday urban existence and white society's lack of acceptance and tendency to label:

> My mother was a very powerful woman. This was so in a time when that

[18] Chinosole, 'Audre Lorde and Matrilineal Diaspora', in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance*, eds., Joanne M. Braxton and Andree Nicola McLaughlin (London: Serpent's Tail, 1990), 384.
[19] Chinosole, ibid.
[20] Chinosole, ibid., 386.

> word-combination of *woman* and *powerful* was almost unexpressable in the white american common tongue, except or unless it was accompanied by some aberrant explaining adjective like blind, or hunchback, or crazy, or Black (15).

In an interview with Karla M. Hammond, Lorde discusses such stereotyping on a personal level, of how 'there's always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself – whether its *Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc* – because that's the piece they need to key into'.[21] 'They' need to separate characteristics and categorise; however, for Lorde it is imperative to 'live in harmony with your contradictions…to live and flourish, to move where you need to go'.[22]

In *Zami* Lorde continues to explain how she believes that 'women-oriented women', or 'Black dykes' (15), have always existed despite the fact that the latter term would have been abhorrent to her mother. This argument stems from an anthropological survey of Carriacou and Grenada by Donald Hill, mentioned in Lorde's 'Acknowledgments'. Hill writes that many women of these islands are described as 'zamis', namely, lesbians. They are 'mostly married women whose husbands have been abroad many years'.[23] Hill continues to explain that when the husband 'returns from abroad it is said to be difficult for him to regain his wife's sexual favors. He must therefore permit his wife to remain a zami, hoping that she will become bisexual'.[24] 'Zami' is therefore Lorde's spiritual and emotional connection to a matrilineal heritage and yet metamorphosed and interposed among Lorde's multiple identities of Black,

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[21] Karla M. Hammond, 'Audre Lorde: Interview', in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, ed., Joan Wylie Hall (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 31.
[22] Hammond, ibid.
[23] Donald Hill, 'The Impact of Migration on the Metropolitan and Folk Society of Carriacou, Grenada', *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, 54 (1977), 191-391 (280).
[24] Hill, ibid., 281.

female, lesbian, daughter, lover, sister, friend. Thus the importance here is to illustrate the flux and fluidity of multiple identities, so as to re-map a Black female life story that would historically have remained misrepresented. This text in particular offers the spectrum of peripheral, reviled or politically incorrect identities that challenge the readers of this text to claim *all* parts of themselves.

Open and Closed Spaces

On a macro level, space can be interpreted as the personal position one occupies in society. For a Black woman this has historically been a position that has been denied to her both culturally and politically. Furthermore, for a Black lesbian, such a socio-political space becomes more restrictive. Barbara DiBernard illustrates the tension within Black Feminist literary criticism with regard to how lesbianism is considered by writers such as Lorde as akin to 'strength and woman-identification in Black women'.[25] Alice Walker has challenged this construction of Black women as 'lesbian', alternatively preferring the term 'womanist'.[26] Nonetheless, Lorde's own sense of invisibility regarding her identity is representative of the cultural issues of the 1950s. As Black, she is segregated and oppressed; as a woman, she is expected to remain politically passive; and as a lesbian, she is a socially unacceptable individual. A combination of the three leads to Lorde's personal inability to socially reposition her 'self' until she is emotionally equipped and capable of filling the missing spaces, of giving voice to the cultural silences. Anna Wilson suggests that in *Zami* 'all the possible tactics for political opposition are played

[25] DiBernard, 'Zami: A Portrait of an Artist as a Black Lesbian', 198, 206.
[26] Alice Walker, 'Gifts of Power', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (London: The Women's Press, 1987), 81.

out, serially and together'.[27] Thus, Lorde's text can be interpreted as a metatext of resistance, a narrative that challenges the 'norm' by its sheer existence. *Zami* has been relegated by theory and critics to the corpus of Black lesbian feminist narratives; however, Lorde's portrayal of the changing cultural occurrences in her life is indicative of a more general socio-political and therefore important critical enquiry into Western society's attitudes toward its 'peripheral' people.

On a micro level, space can obviously be considered as the immediate physical environment one occupies. This becomes manifest in *Zami* as Lorde attempts to comprehend and make sense of her mother whilst living in the restrictive spaces of a New York tenement building. To the young Audre, this light-skinned, '*Redbone*' woman, who is her mother, appears different to other mothers, 'different how?..I never knew' (15). Furthermore, Lorde's parents achieve complete parental unity, 'they moved in concert' with Linda sharing in total marital equality.[28] The three daughters' behaviour often necessitates a parental discussion held behind the closed door of their bedroom. However, these rooms, walls and doors enforce a secretive atmosphere, and place barriers between individuals. Lorde describes this mode of living as 'very painful' as it 'really shut us out'.[29] More particularly, Linda's inexplicable 'difference' becomes the central cause of many of Lorde's childhood sorrows. AnnLouise Keating argues that only when Lorde acknowledges 'the difference between herself and her mother' can she begin 'to acquire her own voice'.[30] Indeed, Linda's silent [in]difference acts as the initial trigger that will

[27] Anna Wilson, *Persuasive Fiction: Feminist Narrative and Critical Myth* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001), 113.
[28] Ellen Shapiro, 'Audre Lorde', in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 19.
[29] Shapiro, ibid.
[30] AnnLouise Keating, 'Making "Our Shattered Faces Whole": The Black Goddess and Audre Lorde's Revision of Patriarchal Myth, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 13 (1992), 20-33 (23).

propel Lorde toward self-definition. In an interview with Adrienne Rich, Lorde describes 'the important value of nonverbal communication…that was what you had to learn to decipher and use'.[31]

Physicality is also intrinsic to Linda's otherness; she more than manages to fill her social space, but it is a restrictive one that has been culturally and politically assigned to her. Despite this, in her community she has an air of self-belief and authority obvious to those around her:

> My mother and her two sisters were large and graceful women whose ample bodies seemed to underline the air of determination with which they moved through their lives in the strange world of Harlem and america (16).

As Elizabeth Alexander points out, Lorde's purposeful use of the lower case 'a' for America illustrates her 'prerogative as maker of the body of the book and letting her spelled language bear her perspective on the world'.[32] Similarly, 'black' becomes elevated to 'Black'. Thus, Lorde exercises *her* right to capitalise or not, and in this grammatical reversal, successfully emphasises Black women's predominantly lower class existence in 'america'. These were the years of the Great Depression leading up to the Second World War, a time of poverty and lack of opportunity for 'Black people in particular' (20). With this tumultuous political background, Lorde depicts her childhood education in a 'sight-conservation class' (21) which becomes her uncomfortable introduction to the wider world. Lorde subtly positions this period of personal instability against the political insecurity of the Black individual in American society. The irony is

[31] Adrienne Rich, 'An Interview with Audre Lorde' (1979), in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 47.
[32] Elizabeth Alexander, 'Coming out Blackened and Whole: Fragmentation and Reintegration in Audre Lorde's *Zami* and *The Cancer Journals*', *American Literary History*, 6 (1994), 695-715, (704).

felt through Lorde's portrayal of a system of educational awards and punishments that means Audre veers from the paradoxically named naughty 'brownies' to the perfect 'fairies' and back again (30).

Lorde's home life is as equally confusing to her developing sense of self with Carriacouan words being used as euphemisms for the body. Thus, the body and its inner workings become a site of secrecy and shame, of hidden meanings and mystification. Similarly, desire and sensuality in such an environment become equally 'masked and cryptic, but attended in well-coded phrases' (32). Despite such secrecy, there is a sense of a hereditary discourse of private emotions being passed down through Linda. As a consequence, transference of female power and knowledge manifests itself physically during the ritual braiding and oiling of Lorde's hair. Lorde sits between Linda's legs; the mother's hands are firmly placed upon her daughter's head. Braiding Lorde's hair, Barbara DiBernard suggests, implies it is Linda's responsibility to make her daughter appear socially acceptable, 'rather than society's to be accepting'.[33] In whatever way this scene is read, there is an acceptance of the daughter by the mother.

DiBernard writes that feminist psychologists, most notably Jean Baker Miller, Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan have examined the pre-Oedipal stage of development with regard to its 'gender identity formation'.[34] Male and female infants are equally dependent on the mother figure, as 'ego boundaries' between child and carer at this stage are 'not fixed but fluid'. A boy progresses and matures differently to girls, since 'he' must 'eventually distinguish himself from his mother in order to develop his

[33] DiBernard, 'Zami: A Portrait of an Artist as a Black Lesbian', 205
[34] DiBernard, ibid., 196.

gender identity'.[35] For girls, a 'break' from the mother is not necessary, thus 'female gender identity continues to be relationship'. [36] Gilligan makes the point that 'issues of femininity or feminine identity do not depend on the achievement of separation from the mother or on the progress of individuation', furthermore, 'female gender identity is threatened by separation'.[37] For Lorde, 'Lesbian' thus becomes a generic term for women-centred women, for those who attempt to adapt their consciousness to an individual 'mode of living and sensation', as it is in *Zami*.[38]

On other occasions, such as Saturday mornings, the mother/daughter relationship is again illustrated through a series of homely and sensory images such as the preparation of a family meal, or the warmth of Linda's body (33). For once, this enclosed space evinces tenderness and security; however, it is short-lived in its positive possibilities. Thus, the resounding result is a sense of unpredictable emotional foundations: '*Wherever the bird with no feet flew she found trees with no limbs*' (34). Lorde's 'bird' has no feet with which to land and even if it did, there would be nothing secure upon which to land, thus it remains in a spiritual limbo. Despite a heritage of strong female intuition, of security within a female orientated community, Linda seems unable to impart this powerful knowledge to her daughter. The emotional gulf that grows between them resembles the geographical and cultural division between Carriacou and America.

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[35] DiBernard, ibid.
[36] DiBernard, ibid.
[37] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 8.
[38] Audre Lorde, 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power', in *Sister Outsider*, 59.

Physical and Emotional Isolation

This sense of emotional isolation is further echoed in the physical alienation that Lorde feels in her family unit: 'I grew up feeling like an only planet, or some isolated world in a hostile, or at best, unfriendly, firmament' (34). Juxtaposed with Lorde's desire for closeness is the fluctuating relationship with her mother. Therefore, it is possible to trace Lorde's adult difficulty with being alone back to her childhood and sense of isolation. When she briefly encounters another little girl on the stoop of her apartment building (37), the young Lorde experiences a spiritual connection. This fleeting meeting with 'Toni' acts as a reversal of the brushing ritual between Linda and her daughter. Toni sits between Lorde's legs and thus illustrates the multiple possibilities of female bonds. Toni further illustrates the differences between people that Lorde has already noted through her mother. Toni is pretty, slender, dressed beautifully and this forces Lorde to examine her own physical self. However, the connection is again irreversibly broken by Linda as she walks out of the building and the image of Toni is relegated to 'that place from which all dreams are made' (42).

Claudine Raynaud argues that such narrative inclusions that evoke childhood emotions illustrate how 'The feminist lesbian poet consciously recaptures past feelings', but claims these are 'translatable only by poetry'.[39] This appears to be a rather singular view considering Lorde is more politically motivated when, in prose, she argues that: 'poetry is not a luxury', it acts as an 'illumination' within which Black women predicate their 'hopes and dreams toward survival and change', and ultimately, 'action'.[40] Thus

[39] Raynaud, 'A Nutmeg Nestled Inside Its Covering of Mace', 228.
[40] Lorde, 'Poetry is Not a Luxury', in *Sister Outsider*, 37.

poetic myth becomes more personal and political and must, for Lorde, be 'carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives'.[41] In a conversation with Adrienne Rich, Lorde explained the importance of preserving her perceptions, to 'battle to win through and to keep them – pleasant or unpleasant, painful or whatever'.[42] In a similar vein, Alice Walker wrestles with the complexity of re-writing the past and raises questions about how and what we choose to remember and hence how we illustrate the revelatory and defensive features within writing:

> If I find myself way off into an improbable tale, imagining it or telling it, then I can guess something horrible has happened to me and that I can't bear to think about it…do you think this is how storytelling came into being? That the story is only the mask for the truth?[43]

The myth that Raynaud discusses could also be considered as merely a mask for the truth; that Lorde's 'biomythography' and mythopoetic inclusions are also an act of transforming the harsh political reality of life for the Black individual. For Gloria Anzaldúa, 'the danger in writing is *not* fusing our personal experience and world view with the social reality we live in, with our inner life, our history, our economics, and our vision' [my emphasis].[44]

Lorde's writing blurs the line between fact and fantasy, further seen through her belief that her two elder sisters have 'a magical and charmed existence' in their 'tiny but complete' room (43). This physical separation from Phyllis and Helen strengthens

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[41] Lorde, ibid.
[42] Adrienne Rich, 'An Interview with Audre Lorde', in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 45.
[43] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1993), 132.
[44] Gloria Anzaldúa, '"Speaking in Tongues": A Letter to Third World Women Writers', in *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds., Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1981), 209.

Lorde's sense of seclusion; ironically this is juxtaposed with her lack of privacy as Linda never leaves her unaccompanied in the apartment. When the family go on holiday Lorde is allowed an element of privacy and yet she still feels isolated and alone (44). Lorde's sense of unhappiness and night-time fear evaporates as soon as her sisters join her in bed. Their whispered recounting of fantastical stories contains examples of young girls as strong and daring heroines and shows Lorde the power of story-telling. This female connection allows her imagination to forge new and powerful identities. Lorde is fascinated by the 'very idea of telling stories and not getting whipped for telling untrue' (46). Thus, the value of the imagination and verbal relating of ideas have potential powers of revitalisation, of nourishing an individual: 'The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us…whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free'.[45]

Lorde's existence has largely been kept within a female domain. Her father remains a distant yet respected figure, her mother remaining the dominant individual in her daughter's life. However, Linda's inability to elucidate the harsh racial realities of life to the young Audre, leads to a fissure in the founding of an effective and positive Black female future. Nevertheless, the adult Lorde defies erasure by narratively voicing the negative effects of racial domination, thus *Zami* and its socio-political opposition exposes the 'destructive effects of power structures within society'.[46] Despite the focus of her article being the body, Margaret Kissam Morris succinctly asserts that Lorde 'repositions marginal categories, placing them in the center of her discourse'.[47]

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[45] Lorde, 'Poetry is Not a Luxury', in *Sister Outsider*, 38.
[46] Morris, 'Audre Lorde: Textual Authority and the Embodied Self', 183.
[47] Morris, ibid., 178.

Later on in 1945, Lorde's first 'experience' with a boy exemplifies her naïve knowledge of her own body and Linda's aversion to explaining the facts of life. Lorde is forced to allow a much bigger boy from her school to 'stick his "thing" between [her] legs', leading to confusion that develops into a sense of shame (75). The culmination is a further division between mother and daughter, whereby communication fails and in its place is secrecy and fear with regard to bodily functions. Lorde describes her mother's 'strange way with words; if one didn't serve her…she'd just make up another'.[48] Linda's 'double messages' intensify Lorde's ignorance and generate further admonitions, the 'nightmarish evocations and restrictions' of Lorde's developing sexuality being verbalised negatively by her mother (76-77). Elizabeth Alexander explains how Linda's evasions act as a narrative contrast to Lorde's continual awareness and mapping of her body: 'Lorde keeps readers aware of what the body feels, piece by piece…from abortion cramps to sweat running between her breasts'.[49]

Lorde looks deep inside herself for the vestiges of maternal Black ancestral power, inherited from Linda and discovers the lack of fulfilment felt by her mother. Thus, Lorde's physical and emotional isolation is juxtaposed with the racial implications of being Black in mid-twentieth-century America. 'Black' becomes the means through which Lorde attempts to share emotions and desires; however 'Black', for her, remains polluted with:

> My mother's words teaching me all manner of wily and diversionary defences learned from the white man's tongue, from out of the mouth of her father. She had had to use these defences, and had survived by them, and had also died by them a little, at the same time (58).

[48] Rich, 'An Interview with Audre Lorde', in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 47.
[49] Alexander, 'Coming out Blackened and Whole', 701.

There is a disturbance of the matrilineal wisdom of past generations of Carriacouan women. Their knowledge becomes distant, obscured by the socio-political spectre of racism that imbues the daily lives of Black people. Without a stronger, more positive female and communal 'self', Lorde suggests that Black individuals will flounder in a white sea that permits no stable Black female identity. Thus, it appears imperative to examine and highlight the socio-political realities for Black women in the mid-twentieth-century. Many critics, such as Yvonne M. Klein, locate *Zami* within a 'mythical matriarchal past…entirely separate from twentieth-century sociopolitical life'.[50] However, I argue that this restrictive view prevents wider historical implications and furthermore, denies the literal existence of the women in Lorde's life, such as Gennie, individuals to whom Lorde gives voice in her text. In this vein, AnnLouise Keating argues that the power of Lorde's words is in allowing women to redefine themselves and their world and highlights Lorde's insistence 'that both white women and women of color must reject the words of the white fathers and speak' in order to achieve genuine selfhood and power.[51]

The answer is to share and make verbal one's experiences and emotions, not to fade into the shadows and hence, as Lorde stated in an interview with Karla Hammond, embrace and *teach* 'a people, a race, a sex, a time'.[52] An adaptation of silence into a viable discourse and form of action will lead, Lorde believes, into an 'act of self-revelation'.[53] There are risks involved in such an undertaking, since non-action results in

[50] Yvonne M. Klein, 'Myth and Community in Recent Lesbian Autobiographical Fiction', in *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, eds., Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 337.
[51] Keating, 'Our Shattered Faces Whole', 23.
[52] Rich, 'Audre Lorde: Interview', in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 31.
[53] Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action', in *Sister Outsider*, 42.

the isolation and self-rejection of which Lorde speaks. Silence and alienation are consequential factors of fear: 'fear of contempt, of censure…or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation…of…visibility'.[54] In *Sister Outsider*, Lorde explains how Black women have always been socially visible, and thus vulnerable, because of their colour and yet are ironically rendered invisible 'through the depersonalization of racism'.[55] Thus writers such as Audre Lorde question society's characterisation of women to a profound degree.[56] Lorde ruptures preconceived stereotypes in order that Black lesbians are viewed as women first and foremost. Therefore, the sense of reality that is juxtaposed with the element of revisionist myth in this biomythography must equally be examined, for to ignore it would be 'self-negating'.[57]

Lorde is the only Black student in her new Catholic school and soon suffers not only from the racist ignorance of her pre-adolescent classmates, but more so from the Sisters of St. Catherine's School, who 'were downright hostile', their racism being 'unadorned, unexcused, and particularly painful because I was unprepared for it' (59). With little support from her family, Lorde becomes not only racially alienated in the public sphere, but also isolated in her private life. The microcosmic world of St. Catherine's reflects the macrocosmic issue of 'American racism', seen most effectively during Lorde's portrayal of a family trip to Washington (68). Not only does this episode effectively illustrate segregation, but also the problematic nature of colour itself. Linda is pale-skinned and yet resembles those very people that Lorde is warned never to trust. Linda's sisters are darker, Lorde's father even more so, and the three daughters are

[54] Lorde, ibid.
[55] Lorde, ibid.
[56] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 199.
[57] Lorde, 'Uses of the Erotic', in *Sister Outsider*, 53-59.

'somewhere in-between' (69). On the train journey to the capital, Linda avoids using the dining car because she questions its standard of hygiene. In reality, 'Black people were not allowed into railroad dining cars headed south in 1947' (68). Lorde's racial experiences have always been based on Linda's excuses or her parents' united attempt to avoid confrontation. In her young mind, racism amounts to a form of basic unfairness or ignorance of those who cause it. Lorde's perfunctory awareness is really awakened, however, when the family are refused service at an ice cream parlour in Washington. Lorde's flaring anger is counteracted by her family's pretence that 'nothing unusual and anti-american had occurred' (70). The sensory imagery that portrays Lorde's reaction is stark in content, the cold reality of segregation and racism having an obvious effect:

> The waitress was white, and the counter was white, and the ice cream I never ate…that summer I left childhood was white, and the white heat and the white pavement and the white stone monuments…made me sick to my stomach (71).

Images of whiteness pervade this description, from the dominance of the white waitress on an individual level to that of the social and comprehensive whiteness of the capital city. Thus white power eradicates all colour and diversity leaving nothing but a glaring gap. Lorde defies such erasure by appropriating from the dominant culture 'the authority to speak', her poetry and prose determinedly filling the vacant spaces.[58] Hues of Black and brown range in perspective as Lorde's family illustrates, thus the concept of 'Blackness' becomes subjective, and yet the depth of the colour of one's skin is significant with regard to external 'white' perceptions.[59] In Washington, Lorde's

[58] Morris, 'Audre Lorde: Textual Authority and the Embodied Self', 176.
[59] Kathy Russell, et. al., 'Masters, Slaves, and Lovers', in *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 9-23.

previously held attitudes are visibly stripped down to the harsh realities of life for a *Black* individual in mid-century *white* America.

Identity Development

Lorde's maturation and identity development is aided by her integration with fellow high school students. For the teenage Lorde, individualism and acceptance of difference are distant concepts and issues, for in school, she 'belongs' to The Branded, an ironically self-defined group of outsiders. Elizabeth Alexander defines this period of Lorde's life as characterised by her 'need to name oneself, rather than leave it to a hostile dominant culture'[60]; thus for Lorde, the power lies in her ability to self-define and not to be 'branded' as Black. However, even though the group never discuss racial difference and its wider negative social effects, Lorde is never invited to white friends' homes. They may deplore racism and yet they choose to 'conquer it by ignoring it' (81).

Lorde's 'search' to fill the emotional void leads to her relationship with Gennie, 'the first person…I was ever conscious of loving. She was my first true friend' (87). This is 1948, a time of political transformation with the Israeli 'new nation', a 'free' India, and Red China, all exciting Lorde politically with regard to the potential power of radical change. The world contains new possibilities, and for Lorde, this is the backdrop for her own personal revolution; Lorde states that *Zami* is an 'accurate account of a time and place' both of which influence her 'life story'.[61] Correspondingly, through Gennie, Lorde discovers multiple identities, as they role play and dress up in a variety of guises, actions

[60] Alexander, 'Coming out Blackened and Whole', 700.
[61] Karla Jay, 'Speaking the Unspeakable: Poet Audre Lorde', in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 110.

that will augment the development of Lorde's adult identity. However, their relationship is short-lived because Gennie commits suicide which leaves Lorde distraught. Their relationship was a seed of hope, of potential female empowerment that Lorde felt was missing in her life. Where Lorde's mother and sisters fail to fill the void, Gennie's understanding and unconditional love had begun to do so. Her memory will, however, live on and become a source of creative affirmation and strength. After Gennie's death, Linda attempts to confer a sense of invulnerability upon her daughter, to forge a 'pain-resistant replica of herself' (101). This effort to endow the self-sustaining power and survival techniques of her fore-mothers only serves to cause the ever-present rift to widen between mother and daughter.

In 1951, Lorde leaves home and has an affair with a white boy named Peter; the interracial implications horrify her parents (103). Now feeling more isolated than ever, Lorde commences her journey of self-discovery:

> I began to seek some more fruitful return than simple bitterness from this place of my mother's exile, whose streets I came to learn better than my mother…But thanks to what she did know and could teach me, I survived in them better than I could have imagined…there I found other women who sustained me and from whom I learned other loving (104).

Lorde shows the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship. Here, she appreciates strength and survival learned from her mother, which have been repositioned in her present situation. Gloria Joseph suggests that Black daughters soon ascertain that their mothers are not individually accountable for not being able, through their personal endeavours, to make straightforward changes in the lives of their children. Although Lorde felt an empty spiritual space within, as a result of her mother's survival techniques,

she is still somehow culturally equipped with the power to recognise racial inequality and prejudice. Lorde's adult recognition exemplifies how Black 'daughters in later life' become 'more…understanding, and forgiving of their mothers when they are unable to fulfil and meet their daughters' expectations and needs for material and emotional comforts'.[62]

Sex with Peter is not as Lorde expects; she feels demeaned despite friends' promises that 'she'll get used to it' (105). The male body is not what Lorde desires; there have been no previously positive male connections in her life, and the relationship with her father is physically distant. The corporeal reality of the male body remains obscure; however, it is physical contact, security and love from another individual for which Lorde yearns most. The discovery that she is pregnant places Lorde in a female reality that highlights gender and therefore socio-political difference. It is the strength and survival techniques of her mother that sustain her through this predicament. Peter does not. The social and psychological impact of pregnancy comes to the fore with horrific examples of 'cheap kitchen table abortions' (107). Lorde is further propelled into isolation during this particular juncture of her life when she realises there is no-one to whom to turn except for Ann, a nurse with whom she works. Ironically, Ann and Lorde flirt with each other and when Lorde explains her situation, Ann disappointedly claims, 'I thought you was gay!' (108). This is the first mention of sexual identity and Lorde inwardly resents being specifically labelled. Juxtaposed with this is Lorde's abortion. This section exemplifies what Elizabeth Alexander contends is the literal embodiment of Lorde within the text, of how erotic love is written about as a 'process of healing the body and making it and the

[62] Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis, 'Black Mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Functions in American Society', in *Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 96.

resident psyche whole again'.[63] However, Alexander's critical move from the physical to the psychological is only to illustrate Lorde's 'self-culled sexual identity'.[64] The purposeful description and experience is one that leads Lorde towards self-awareness and a more defined sense of self-preservation: 'it was a choice of pains. That's what living was all about' (111). The 'body' thus becomes merely a vehicle through which the psyche experiences the realities of life.

A Burgeoning Sexual Identity

A self-conscious decision to have a lesbian affair is Lorde's first definitive sexual choice and move towards a self-accepted sexuality. However, this is 1952, the height of 'the McCarthy era'[65], a fear-inducing time for anyone who does not sexually or politically 'fit' into American society (121). A new move and new job appear beneficial and yet Lorde merely transfers old scars and wounds to a different environment. The act of leaving or running away does not put to rest the ghosts from the past. Life as a manual factory worker trundles laboriously on until Lorde meets Ginger. Impressions and stereotypes abound as Lorde presumes Ginger is 'straight as a die', whilst Ginger considers Lorde a 'citified little baby butch' (133). This desire to label and compartmentalise is a human characteristic, and is seen to a large extent in the gay sub-culture.[66] For Lorde, verbalising her sexuality is a definitive moment and a politicised

[63] Alexander, 'Coming out Blackened and Whole', 709.
[64] Alexander, ibid., 710.
[65] Richard M. Fried, *The McCarthy Era in Perspective: Nightmare in Red* (New York: Oxford University press, 1990), 167.
[66] Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Palgrave, 2003), 42, 64.

expression; her inexperience, however, confers a sense of anxiety and new set of personal apprehensions.

Sexual neuroses and preoccupations permeate this and other episodes. Liberating herself from preconceived ideas is only possible when she internalises and thus focuses on her own desire and genuine affection for Ginger. This culminates in a naturally flowing motion of love-making (139). For Lorde, this is where she belongs; it is that physical, spiritual, emotional and female connection for which she has yearned. This nourishes her burgeoning sexual identity and propels her toward a sense of 'wholeness' and yet the wider social impact of her 'choice' is not lost on Lorde. She suffers a fear of not being accepted, fear of loving and thus possible abandonment. Ginger's mother's judgement exemplifies wider attitudes when she tells Lorde sardonically, 'Friends are nice, but marriage is marriage' (142). Henceforth begins a dichotomy in Lorde's life, one in which heterosexual issues and attitudes constantly inform her lesbian relationships. Only when Lorde accepts her 'difference' and conquers her isolation issues, will she be free to love women unconditionally.

Positive thoughts of a move to a new apartment are juxtaposed with the cultural and political realities of 1953 America. The relationship with Ginger has ended and Lorde now lives platonically with Rhea, 'a progressive white woman' (147). Life and politics enmesh as Rhea and Lorde demonstrate and picket the White House in support of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. The Rosenbergs become synonymous for Lorde, and many others, for the tense political climate in America.[67] For Lorde, the McCarthy era epitomises a country that demands 'survival in hostile surroundings' (149) particularly, of intrusive

[67] Dennis Hume Wrong, *Reflections on a Politically Skeptical Era* (Edison, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 199.

questions as to your 'sexual orientation' which 'enforced a rigid homosexual /heterosexual divide'.[68] This makes for an atmosphere of tenuous relationships, suspicion and avoidance of close friendships. The Rosenbergs' electrocution on June 19, 1953, further exemplifies issues of insecurity and curtailment of freedom.[69]

Zami continually keeps the reader aware of the historical factors that influence Lorde's life and as her sexual experience develops, so does her knowledge and acceptance of her sexual 'self'. Furthermore, by setting these socio-political episodes alongside her personal life means Lorde determinedly re-positions herself as a Black woman amid American cultural history. However, a personal and individual sense of isolation remains closely linked with her socio-political and communal alienation. There are only a few bars and clubs that act as meeting places, thus, discovering the sexual orientation of another woman could lead to ill-matched unions purely from a sense of loneliness. Lorde describes how she meets Bea, a woman with whom she has moved beyond 'investigative discussions about loving women' (150). Lorde compares their sexual relationship with her previous lover, Ginger, who was far more physically and emotionally generous than Bea. Bea psychologically reflects the turbulent political times. She is often reserved and secretive, and yet when spurned by Lorde, becomes extremely agitated and accusatory. Bea has no eroticism, and for Lorde, this 'term' does not purely refer to a sexual nature. Lorde explains that the site of potential creativity and eroticism within which women can exist:

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[68] David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 162.
[69] John F. Neville, *The Press, The Rosenbergs, and the Cold War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1995), 1-2.

> For the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness.[70]

Bea fails to have such a spiritual or erotic connection with women, her relationship with Lorde is based purely on their common interest of guitars and old music. It is only this mutual interest that tentatively holds the relationship together, so as it wanes, dreams of Mexico grow. Lorde's learned self-preservation and survival techniques come to the fore as she makes the decision to leave; as Kara Provost indicates, Lorde refuses 'to become a passive victim or conform to excessively limited roles'.[71] Bea's emotional passivity and sexual coolness flares into the fury of a woman scorned, leaving a guilty, but free Lorde heading for Mexico City with the 'hounds of hell at [her] heels' (153).

Lorde is astounded by the positive cultural differences she experiences in Mexico City, as opposed to New York City. A general social acceptance of Lorde's outer appearance leads to a sense of inner security, 'people in the street…smiled without knowing me' (155). Hence Lorde blossoms in this environment, her geographical explorations enabling the unfolding 'like some large flower' of her 'self' (155). She loses a life-long habit of looking down at her feet; she no longer invites invisibility. There is finally an affirmation of her skin as Lorde sees in the people she meets, her colour reflected in a myriad of tones. Lorde becomes not only visible within and to her environment, but more importantly, to herself. There begins a creation of a newly-found cultural space within which she can peacefully exist. Moving to the outskirts of the city,

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[70] Lorde, 'Uses of the Erotic', in *Sister Outsider*, 54-55.
[71] Kara Provost, 'Becoming Afrekete: The Trickster in the Work of Audre Lorde', *MELUS*, 20 (1995), 45-59 (56).

to Cuernavaca, leads to further security and an element of privacy through the acquisition of an apartment, an individual physical space with her own front door. The importance of this is paramount; having a home of her own is parallel to an inner happiness of which her consciousness slowly becomes aware.

Cuernavaca is a cultural and political haven for American expatriates during the McCarthy era[72], since 'there was not the stench of terror and political repression so present in New York' (159). McCarthyism's intrusive and repressive characteristic, however, has reached as far as Mexico[73]; Morton Sobell, an 'alleged co-conspirator of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg had been hustled' out of Mexico and right back across the border to stand trial for treason (159). This atmosphere of caution and fear literally saturates the air conflicting with the 'luscious bougainvillea' (159). From a narrative perspective, the flowers' outward beauty mirrors the façade created by the progressive women Lorde meets whose very existence 'was devoted toward concealing' their sexuality, 'their political courage was far greater than their sexual openness' (160). Lorde's preconceived notions of lesbian identity become challenged for the first time as she realises that not all lesbians are under the age of forty and bohemian city girls. One of the women, Eudora, becomes Lorde's guide to a more down-to-earth and honest approach to same-sex desire, and as their friendship blossoms, so does their mutual attraction. Their relationship encompasses a reciprocal and open desire, a love that aspires to bring tender sustenance to two emotionally and physically scarred individuals. Their silent touching speaks volumes. There is no need to verbalise deep and embedded issues of insecurity and uncertainty because both women understand how the other feels.

[72] Fried, *The McCarthy Era in Perspective: Nightmare in Red*, 156.
[73] Ronald Radosh and Joyce Milton, eds., *The Rosenberg File* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

Their desire illustrates Lorde's inexperience in relating her sexual identity to her socio-political self. As yet, she has no words to express her feelings; there is no discourse available to articulate the emotions of a Black, working-class lesbian in an interracial relationship. Only as her experience grows and develops will Lorde be able to fill the silence with her voice and as Raynaud suggests, change representations of powerlessness into statements of strength.[74] Thus, Eudora becomes physically powerful despite her mastectomy and 'difference'.

It is Eudora who introduces Lorde to the smell, texture and colour of Mexico that ultimately nourishes and sustains her on her journey of self-discovery, this 'journey to herself'.[75] Eudora teaches Lorde how to receive love; however, their privacy is held up for public scrutiny, albeit in the confines of their small community. The petty gossip is juxtaposed with the changing social policies of the time, thus melding the personal with the political; again this emphasises Lorde's social re-positioning and reinforcing of the Black individual. It is 1954 and McCarthy is censured and desegregation in schools is announced.[76] Lorde's Black identity appears to be validated on a larger social scale. Her sense of cultural and emotional invisibility slowly begins to recede, culminating in an individual recognition of her true worth. Eudora's love, the political amendments, Mexico and its acceptance of 'color and dark people' all converge and allow this liberation of her self (175). When Eudora suddenly disappears, Lorde is obviously upset but not emotionally disorientated or spiritually lost. Her personal growth is such that invisibility is no longer an option.

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[74] Raynaud, 'A Nutmeg Nestled Inside Its Covering of Mace', 241,
[75] DiBernard, 'Zami: A Portrait of an Artist as a Black Lesbian', 208.
[76] Joel H. Spring, *American Education* (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 114.

Due to a lack of written history regarding same-sex identity, the reality of being gay and female in the 1950s is one of isolation. As Lorde states, 'There were no mothers, no sisters, no heroes' (176) to call upon when one needed advice or support. This is a time of forging that necessary history, of exploring female relationships and yet the emphasis is on solitary discovery. There appears to be little solidarity among Black lesbians, considered 'exotic sister-outsiders' by themselves and the white women with whom they sleep (177). The divisions are noticeable in the gay sub-culture of downtown New York with similar class divisions existing within Lorde's community. This social and cultural complexity demonstrates the necessity of considering the heterogeneity within such sub-cultures; however, 'This was the fifties and the gulf between the Village gay scene and the college crowd was sharper and far more acrimonious than any town-grown war' (177).

Lorde straddles these two groups that contain even more divisions; the sociosexual 'fissures' and 'fractures' as described by Hall.[77] As a student, her sexuality remains secret, her colour isolating her from many of her classmates. As a lesbian, her education stays private, her colour still alienating her from many of her contemporaries. Stereotypes and labels abound throughout the gay scene; even those not interested in role-playing are pigeonholed as part of the 'freaky' bunch of lesbians such as Lorde and her Black friend Felicia (177). Lorde's response is to neither retreat to a comfortingly limited identity nor to try to conform to each group's various criteria of acceptability. Lorde refuses these approaches because she sees how they encourage an 'eclipsing or denying' of 'the other parts of self'.[78] As Provost argues, in this context, 'identifying with the liminal…offers

[77] Hall, *Queer Theories*, 51.
[78] Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex', in *Sister Outsider*, 120.

Lorde alternatives to being silenced, rigidly confined, or completely isolated'.[79] In addition, it must be argued that by retrospectively identifying with politics, relationships and past experience, Lorde succeeds in relocating her 'self' within the possibly prohibitive nature of identity and its discursive patterns.

Role-playing and Difference

Role-playing appears paramount for many of the lesbians Lorde meets. Their identity hinges upon whether they are 'butch' or 'femme', 'Ky-Ky, or AC/DC' (178). Sexual identities converge and diverge in a culture more concerned with such distinctions, Lorde certainly not fitting neatly into any category. In the gay clubs she is still an 'an invisible Black…and a general intruder' (178). She remains distant from her familial Black community, and continues to be so from her college contemporaries and lesbian acquaintances. External forces are potentially hostile towards Lorde and the community she and other women endeavour to forge. Hostility due to the colour of her skin and chosen sexual orientation may prevail; nevertheless, attempts at communication between lesbians of various cultural backgrounds will form the foundations for later women's movements (179). In this vein, Lorde explains how such a 'constant drain of energy…might be better used in redefining…and defining realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future'.[80] However, the habitual sensation of 'invisibility' continues with regard to Lorde's lesbianism and race. Her sexuality is ignored or tolerated and colour complicates issues of being gay for subliminally racist

[79] Provost, 'Becoming Afrekete: The Trickster in the Work of Audre Lorde', 48.
[80] Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex', in *Sister Outsider*, 115.

white lesbians. Survival is paramount, the effort 'to stay human' (181) uppermost on her mind. Lorde is forging a new emotional space within which to exist, one that doesn't entail patriarchal acceptance with regard to outward appearance and behaviour. Lorde refuses 'to recognize those differences'.[81] Thus Lorde continues to challenge white male epistemological thought by her sheer existence and through the writing of *Zami.*

It is 1954 and Lorde meets a white girl called Muriel. Just as Cuernavaca embodied a political freedom for Lorde, so Muriel liberates and breaches places 'that had been closed off and permanently sealed' since Gennie died (194). For Lorde, the relationship facilitates further investigations into her identity, as a woman and as a lesbian. However, the stark reality is that Rhea moves out in order to protect Lorde from the racist attitudes of her bosses, who denounced Rhea for co-habiting with 'a homosexual, and a Black one at that' (194). Despite this, Muriel and Lorde make a commitment thus forming a 'symbolic marriage' (201). However, the racial differences within the gay community become apparent. They may well be outsiders together, but there is little equality in this social isolation. The socio-political reality of Lorde's colour sets her apart even more, and is a difficult issue to discuss with Muriel. Only another Black lesbian would understand, like Felicia, and only between them can they formulate a new and distinct discourse of their own. This in itself acts as a challenge to power structures in society, for it exposes, as Margaret Kissam Morris suggests, 'the destructive effects of oppression' whilst 'revealing the positive effects of experience fully lived'.[82]

Lorde accepts the necessity to create and develop a new position that allows individuality within a particular group. She, Muriel and others live without stereotypical

[81] Lorde, ibid.
[82] Morris, 'Audre Lorde: Textual Authority and the Embodied Self', 183.

role-playing, or of being labelled as butch or femme, and yet fail to realise that they are not free, as a group, from the social realities of 'capitalism, greed, racism, classism etc' (205). Lorde has always been uncertain of what she should describe herself as and has always preferred not to be categorised at all, hence her belief in the fluid nature of identity. In this sense, Lorde subverts typical notions of lesbianism, of being Black, of being a woman; indeed, she threatens what Roland Barthes described as the *doxa*, namely, established stereotypical meaning.[83] Individuals whom Lorde has met on her journey have positively and negatively imparted a new way of loving as well as living, an experimental way of being, and an alternative way of thinking or '*para-doxa*…that which would resist and disturb the beliefs and forms and codes of that culture'.[84] This has aided a personal reinvention of the personal space that surrounds her. However, Lorde's and Muriel's mutual emotional reliance decelerates Lorde's growth process. Without a pre-history and without positive lesbian role models, Lorde and Muriel struggle with only heterosexual patterns to which to defer suggesting that categories such as man/woman or gay/straight are not as 'separable as we would perhaps like to believe'.[85] In the final weeks of the relationship, they follow the 'steps of an old dance' (214), not yet having invented a new music of their own with which to keep time.

Lorde and Muriel clutch on to the love they had; after all, they had 'learned well in the kitchens of [their] mothers'…who did not let go easily' (214). However, they are not their 'mothers', that is, heterosexual women in heterosexual relationships. Their 'mothers' do not know of the Bagatelle gay bar, of the complicated sexual role-playing or of the subsidiary social castigation that this life entails. Linda understood oppression and

[83] Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 91.
[84] Allen, ibid., 90.
[85] Provost, 'Becoming Afrekete: The Trickster in the Work of Audre Lorde', 51.

racism in a white society, but in *her* own community, she had an element of control and respect. For Lorde, *her* chosen sub-culture or community is a predominantly white environment. Black lesbians remain closeted, silenced and invisible unless they grasped 'power and control' through serious role-playing (224). These Black women were only 'allowed' to be butches, not femmes, because even in this gay community, 'america's racist distortions of beauty…was defined by a white male world's standards'.[86] Strength is in survival and a reinvention of the world can only begin with yourself, with your own attitudes towards being a 'woman'. As Lorde describes it, this was a time when 'the american woman' had 'the role of little wifey' (225), later explained by Betty Friedan as *The Feminine Mystique*.[87] Lesbians, both Black and white, are at least communicating with each other 'in this country in the 1950s, outside of the empty rhetoric of patriotism and political movements' (225). At this level, labels and role-playing mean very little. Being a woman and in control of one's life is of greater importance. As Morris argues for the essential nature of 'otherness', Lorde emphasises 'difference' as an irreversible phenomenon, because we are all intrinsically disparate individuals that exist together.[88]

Erotic Reinvention

As the relationship fails, so Lorde's sense of 'self' appears to disintegrate. Muriel's infidelity hurts Lorde emotionally and propels her to self-harm; she burns herself in order to exorcise poisonous feelings and thoughts. This low self-esteem affects both personal and academic lives, causing individual growth to momentarily stultify: 'I was too beside

[86] Russell, et. al., 'Embracing Whiteness', *The Color Complex,* 41-61.
[87] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1992), 155-160.
[88] Morris, 'Audre Lorde: Textual Authority and the Embodied Self', 183.

myself to consider altering me', until thoughts of Eudora telling her to '*Waste nothing…not even pain. Particularly not pain*' allows a slow recovery (236). The painful emotional fissure that has been opened, symbolised by the wound on Lorde's wrist, slowly dissipates and becomes further juxtaposed with the *healing* scars on her hand. Ironically, Lorde uses the Grenadian bangles given by her mother to disguise the discoloured skin. Heritage and Linda still maintain a niche in Lorde's identity; 'woman power' has the ability to heal, enabling Lorde to continue her journey of self-discovery.

As the healing process continues, Lorde becomes receptive to a rich and spiritual epiphany that propels her into a new psychological space, a rejuvenation of her 'self'. The 'physical realities' of her environment are replaced by a vision: 'I suddenly stood upon a hill in the center of an unknown country, hearing the sky fill with a new spelling of my own name' (239). The emphasis here is on 'center' and 'new'. Lorde envisages a tabula rasa upon which she can imprint her own identity and locates herself in the *centre* of this 'new' imaginary landscape, not as a liminal character on the periphery of society. A maternal heritage permeates this awakening with Carriacouan images embodying home and the motherland, all of which envelop Lorde.[89] This brings the realisation that one can only co-exist, but hopefully, as harmoniously as possible with others.[90] We can only belong to ourselves and attempt to remain true to who we are (240).

Lorde becomes become re-acquainted with a woman called Kitty/Afrekete. Provost refers to 'Afrekete' as the trickster character found in African American literature, a derivation of the African goddess MawuLisa and how, in *Zami*, she positively enables

[89] Raynaud, 'A Nutmeg Nestled Inside Its Covering of Mace', 227.
[90] Hammond, 'Audre Lorde: Interview', in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 31.

Lorde's 'fluid gender orientation'.[91] AnnLouise Keating argues that this character is the 'twentieth century embodiment of an ancient African goddess'[92], whereas, Claudine Raynaud believes Afrekete is 'an incarnation of Lorde's mother'.[93] In contrast, Chinosole suggests Afrekete is Lorde's 'self-projection'.[94] All interpretations are valid and yet possibly too precise considering Lorde explained in an interview with Marion Kraft that the contemporary relevance of a matrilineal tradition is in how one *weaves* such myths into one's world.[95] Thus, the importance is on continuity and change and how Lorde does not become a new person after her epiphany, but one who sees herself in a new and fluid way. Correspondingly, Keating contends that Afrekete and her symbolic cultural heritage formulates a new 'sense of independence and self-worth' for Lorde.[96]

For Lorde, meeting Afrekete reinforces her individual spirit and desire, allowing Lorde to be mistress of her own destiny, aware of where her 'body was going, and that feeling was more important…than any lead or follow' (245). Such awareness flourishes amid Afrekete's exotic environment of coloured and variegated plants alongside the suffused sunlight and 'magical tank of exotic fish' (248). Afrekete's surroundings are ultimately feminine and sensual and are her particular reinvention of the world and thus a rejection of patriarchal definitions. If the outside world for women such as Audre Lorde and her lovers is bleak and intrinsically 'white', then Afrekete's environment is vivid in its affirmative and empowering sensual intensity. The surroundings she has created, amongst an American phallocentric cityscape, are bathed in her own personal ethnic

[91] Provost, 'Becoming Afrekete: The Trickster in the Work of Audre Lorde', 45, 47.
[92] Keating, 'Our Shattered Faces Whole', 26.
[93] Raynaud, 'A Nutmeg Nestled Inside Its Covering of Mace', 238-9.
[94] Chinosole, 'Audre Lorde and Matrilineal Diaspora', 384.
[95] Marion Kraft, 'The Creative Use of Difference', in *Conversations with Audre Lorde*, 149.
[96] Keating, 'Our Shattered Faces Whole', 27.

identity. Afrekete personifies the exotic land and earth of Ma-Mariah and Ma-Liz, of *powerful women* (15); she is textually identified, and personally identifies herself, with the sea; 'her lips moved like surf' (248), the 'tidal motions' of her body representing the moon and the cyclical nature of life (249). Thus, as Keating suggests, Afrekete becomes synonymous with *all* women.[97] Personifying natural elements, of earth, water and air, she is part of life and thus feeds vitality into Lorde's emotional and physical selves.

Lorde's meandering search for a definitive sexual identity has brought her to a position whereby the pain of isolation can metamorphose into the ecstasy of same-sex union. The italicised text immediately emphasises and equally differentiates this particular scene from others in Lorde's life. The image of petals and the blossoming flower evokes the scents and smells of Mexico in conjunction with Lorde's budding self-awareness; the heat of their love recalls all the passion of a past that has the potential to inform an optimistic future. Their spiritual and physical encounter embraces a female tradition, a Black heritage and 'difference' in a contemporary and newly created 'psychic' landscape (250). Suggestions of surrounding dangers toward Black female identity cannot be ignored; however, these threats are general rather than personal. For Lorde has a new consciousness of African American female roots, a definitive awareness of her physical self and other women's bodies.

For Lorde, this experience, in addition to the others, is part of a continual learning process, a coming-to-terms with not only her identity, but with both her body and its desires. These two lovers encompass and celebrate the identities of daughters, mothers, and lesbians; of Black women who have fought in their name. They refute 'the falseness

[97] Keating, ibid., 29.

and one dimensional aspects of' traditional or conservative stereotypes.[98] They embody the binary opposites in all women, 'soft and tough', joy and fear (250). Ironically, Afrekete lives near Gennie's grandmother, which serves to blend childhood and adult losses and loves. Afrekete and Lorde somehow fill the silent void, left by individuals such as Gennie, with their love and enable encouraging possibilities for Black and white lesbians of the future.

The past, present and future intertwine through memories and realities of the women in Lorde's life, who have all offered something in order to understand silence, anger, pain, sacrifice, love and honour. The moon that shines down upon Lorde and Afrekete symbolises female power and continuity: the 'full moon reflected in the shiny mirrors of our sweat slippery dark bodies' is a positive portrayal of same-sex desire:

> *Afrekete Afrekete ride me to the crossroads where we shall sleep, coated in the woman's power. The sound of our bodies meeting is the prayer of all strangers and sisters, that the discarded evils, abandoned at all crossroads, will not follow us upon our journeys.* (252)

These journeys are constant with many decisions to be made along the way; however, Lorde never forgets her '*Sister outsiders*', some of whom 'died inside the gaps between the mirrors' (226). Bettina Aptheker argues that such journeys and stories have the 'potential of rupturing [the patriarchal] system because a lesbian's emotional needs are not focused on men…she stands outside the established norm'.[99] To historicise *Zami* is to critically discover why a society has restricted and repressed women, whether Black or white, lesbian or heterosexual, working or middle class. Furthermore, this form of

[98] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 190.
[99] Bettina Aptheker, *Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Experience* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 94.

examination leads to an understanding of the actual world for all lesbians who have systematically been silenced by a culture that has been threatened by their existence. Thus, Lorde succeeds in reclaiming and re-mapping her own, and others', existence through a historical framework, but one that allows the fluidity and creativity of mythopoetic inclusions.[100] Although Afrekete may eventually leave, her mystical touch remains and leaves a lasting resonant fullness in Audre Lorde's life, one that fills the Black female socio-political void and gives voice to the silent spaces through her creative productivity. As Lorde says:

> Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival.[101]

This chapter has focused upon Lorde's juxtaposition of her personal and political experiences and textual examination shows how she succeeds in re-positioning the Black lesbian within the broader concept of American cultural and political history. Lorde's personal journey of self-discovery, her familial, sexual and interracial relationships in *Zami: A New Spelling Of My Name* fills the socio-political spaces created by a white Anglo-American culture that makes invisible those who fail to function and fit into 'normal' society.

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[100] Chinosole argues that *Zami* uses a static, mythical/fictional frame from beginning to end despite acknowledging the text's 'autobiographical' genre. 'Audre Lorde and Matrilineal Diaspora', 388.
[101] Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex', in *Sister Outsider*, 123.

CHAPTER TWO:

JAMES BALDWIN (1924 – 1987)

Giovanni's Room and *Another Country.*

Homosexuality- Black Perspectives, White Cityscapes.

Figure 2. Times Square, New York – Rufus wanders the streets surrounding Times Square, the classic cityscape (*Another Country*, 5).
Photograph taken by the author, 2007.

Introduction

Black lesbian authors such as Audre Lorde write about both interracial relationships and lesbian experiences; black heterosexual men tell tales of white and mixed race experiences[102], and black gay men such as James Baldwin relate the encounters of black and white homosexual interactions.[103] Lorde and Baldwin offer narratives that portray the complex nature of multi-faceted sexual relationships. James Baldwin especially illustrates the psychological nature of homosexuality, of how an individual is affected by society and cultural concepts of masculinity. W. J. Weatherby explains how these two novels had initially been complexly intertwined and that their separation came about because Baldwin believed that 'to handle homosexuality, the "Negro Problem" and a Paris setting in the same novel' would be beyond his power as a writer.[104] In this chapter, therefore, I interrogate Baldwin's sophisticated negotiation of sexuality in *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* respectively. In so doing, I will formulate the argument that the physical environment impacts upon the subject; that Baldwin is unarguably aware of how the homosexual and black male individual figures in mid-twentieth-century white cityscapes.

Another Country develops the issues of sexuality, isolation and community, which one also finds in *Giovanni's Room*. However, this narrative and main black protagonist, Rufus Scott, are situated in New York City, thus allowing a multiracial cast of characters to be analysed through the theoretical use of cultural geography.[105] With a literal and

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[102] Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman and The Slave* (1964; New York: Perennial, 2001).
[103] James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (1957; London: Penguin Books, 2001). Hereafter, page numbers cited in the text.
[104] W. J. Weatherby, *James Baldwin: Artist on Fire* (New York: Dell, 1989), 121, 125.
[105] James Baldwin, *Another Country* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1962), xi. Hereafter, page numbers cited in the text.

figuratively wider cityscape to consider, *Another Country* encapsulates the lives of a variety of individuals and their heterosexual and homosexual relations with each other. However, the main purpose here is to depict Rufus's emotional and social deterioration parallel to his disastrous sexual encounters, within the wider setting of the cityscape. The reason for this focus, as Stephanie Dunn explains, is that *Another Country* invites our 'centripetal preoccupation with Rufus, his life and, importantly, his death by mapping all the sexual desire that follows through his character'.[106] Both novels and their male protagonists highlight the complex issue of prescribed and socially accepted heterosexuality, because both men suffer from cultural constructs that insist white and black men behave and perform according to patriarchal rules, as close textual examination will illustrate. Emmanuel S. Nelson argues that 'Baldwin's vision of otherness and community is closely related to and dependent on his vision of self', thus, the enmeshed emotional and physical nature of 'community' cannot be ignored.[107] Issues of the individual versus society permeate both narratives, and therefore, I will concentrate on Baldwin's use of the environment, both physical and symbolic, in order to answer Cyraina Johnson-Roullier's question: 'is reality something that is determined by one's surroundings, or is it something one carries in one's head, in terms of beliefs?'.[108]

Giovanni's Room describes the singular story of desire, remorse and yearning that intertwines with the lives of one young white American couple, Hella and David, with the intense Italian barman, Giovanni. Through this, Baldwin innovatively introduces issues

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[106] Stefanie Dunning, 'Parallel Perversions: Interracial and Same Sexuality in James Baldwin's *Another Country*', *MELUS*, 26 (2001), 95-112 (105).
[107] Emmanuel S. Nelson, 'James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community', *MELUS*, 10 (1983), 27-31 (27).
[108] Cyraina Johnson-Roullier, '(An)Other Modernism: James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, and the Rhetoric of Flight', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45 (1999), 932-956 (945).

of bisexuality. Set in 1950s Paris, David embarks on a passionate and ultimately tragic journey of sexual self-discovery. Caryl Phillips also describes this novel as being about 'freedom', the type of liberty for which Baldwin went in search when leaving America for France in 1948 (ix). David leaves his American home seeking answers to his unfulfilled life, subliminally aware of his 'dark' sexual secret. Baldwin, conscious of his sexuality, relocated knowing full well the homophobic and racist attitudes of his birth country.[109] In the autobiographical notes to the collection of which 'Notes of a Native Son' was the title essay, Baldwin describes how he felt forced early in his life to recognise that he was 'a kind of bastard of the West'.[110]

Giovanni's Room has no black characters, predominantly portrays homosexuality and was described by Baldwin as encompassing his philosophy of 'sexuality…politics, economics, and race relations'.[111] James Campbell suggests that such an all-white cast of characters was 'the author's way of distancing himself from his own controversiality'.[112] However, for Baldwin, the more general theme of *Giovanni's Room* 'was the price of lying to yourself, of not facing the truth about yourself'.[113] In a similar vein, Robert Tomlinson suggests that the central themes of 'false innocence, freedom, responsibility – are precisely those which Baldwin evokes when mapping the tragic American confrontation of Black and White'.[114] The tension apparent in this 'cognitive mapping' of race and place introduces Michel Foucault's concept of 'heterotopias', 'those singular

[109] For further information see, Robert Tomlinson, 'Payin' One's Dues: Expatriation as Personal Experience and Paradigm in the Works of James Baldwin', *African American Review*, 33 (1999), 135-148. Also, Mae G. Henderson, 'James Baldwin: Expatriation, Homosexual Panic, and Man's Estate', *Callaloo*, 23 (2000), 313-327.
[110] David Leeming, *James Baldwin* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1994), 4.
[111] Leeming, ibid., 123.
[112] James Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: a Life of James Baldwin* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), 102.
[113] Weatherby, *James Baldwin: Artist on Fire*, 134.
[114] Tomlinson, 'Payin' One's Dues', 139.

spaces to be found in some given social spaces whose functions are different from or even the opposite of others'.[115] The cultural geography of David's American home, Parisian streets and gay bars, Giovanni's room and David's self-exiled house in Southern France become exemplars of heterotopian spaces. Within these spaces differing identities and spatial dynamics force the reader to not only 'oscillate between two irreconcilable interpretations of homosexuality'[116], but also to consider their own prejudices. Thus, these novels can be considered as heterotopian spaces that invite readers to inhabit such textual places so as to offer alternate ways of reading and interpretation.

Giovanni's Room – Part 1

Reality becomes complicated from the outset partially due to the narrator telling the tale from two different perspectives simultaneously. First we hear the voice of the knowledgeable David subsequent to the proceedings of the novel, and secondly, the other voice of David who exists in self-denial and self-exile. David stands alone, facing his reflection in the darkness of a window pane. In contrast he describes himself as fair, with classically Anglo-American features. Immediately, we are positioned in a multitude of contexts. The environment that envelops him is shadowy, his mood accordingly gloomy, his physical presence historically one that embodies oppression:

> My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past. (9)

[115] Michel Foucault, 'Space, Knowledge, and Power', in *The Foucault Reader* ed., Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), 252.
[116] Yasmin DeGout, 'Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in *Giovanni's Room*', *African American Review*, 26 (1992), 425-435 (426).

Amid imagery of a heart of darkness, David will, reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's main protagonist, Marlowe, retrospectively portray his geographical and psychological journey.[117] As Marlowe sailed through the insane invasion of a continent in search of Kurtz, David runs away from *his* nemesis, his sexuality, never to be in a position to conquer these darker aspects of his life. However, both men experience a psychological journey into the unknown and remain peripheral to a society to which they feel no allegiance.

David stands in a house that he and his now ex-fiancée Hella had previously rented. Their heterosexual relationship is described as transparent and as fragile as the glass into which he gazes. He looks back with the realisation that, for him, it was only ever meant to be 'fun' (10). Alternatively, Giovanni transforms David's perceptions of love; however, it is not only personal prejudice and socially prescribed sexual intolerance that destroys any semblance of a relationship, but David's inability to accept his sexual self-identification. David longs for what Hall describes as 'fixity and socially sanctioned sexual identity', whereas Giovanni exemplifies fluidity.[118] David may stand alone and repent the lies he has told to both Hella and Giovanni; however, the biggest untold truth is that David had already felt the passion of same-sex desire; his true identity has become entangled in a web of sexual deceit.

The result of his first homosexual encounter, with a boy called Joey, leaves David with a monstrous fear and sense of vileness which overshadow the mutual trust and desire that had occurred. Negative issues of masculinity and socio-cultural prejudices are exemplified through this teenage sexual experimentation. Homosexuality is made parallel

[117] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902; London: Penguin Books, 1994).
[118] Donald E. Hall, *Queer Theories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Palgrave, 2003), 157.

to a dangerous dark space; 'the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured till madness came, in which I would lose my manhood' (14). Baldwin, like Audre Lorde, believes that homosexuality threatens 'normal' society's 'sense of security and order'.[119] Baldwin exemplifies such a social threat through 'dark' and 'black' metaphors, such as 'the cavern', when issues of David and his lack of psychological knowledge arise in the early section of the novel. As a youth, David *knows* of the 'black…half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words' as spoken by adults such as his father (14). The power of external intolerance to homosexuality forces a firm decision to metaphorically conceal and cover up the entrance to that cavern and thus his natural inclinations and sexual orientation. This dark space reflects Foucault's heterotopian site of 'mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror' of the real world.[120] The mirror, Foucault explains,

> is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place…But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy.[121]

Thus the literal vision of David looking at his reflection in the window is narratively offset by Baldwin with the metaphorical concept of the cavern. From issues of personal identity to the psychological impact of socio-cultural expectation, space and place play an intrinsic part within the first part of this novel. The attempted closure of the cavern is as superficial as David's ensuing conduct when he joins other youths in mocking Joey as it

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[119] Kathleen N. Drowne, 'An Irrevocable Condition: Constructions of Home and the Writing of Place in *Giovanni's Room*', in *Re-Viewing James Baldwin: Things Not Seen*, ed., Daniel Quentin Miller (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000), 79.
[120] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', (1967) trans. Jay Miscowiec, *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuite*, 5 (1984), 46-49.
[121] Foucault, ibid.

relies solely on the 'will' to be considered 'normal'. However, the solitude David feels illustrates how an individual's unresolved psychic landscape never changes regardless of fresh geographical surroundings.

Issues of David's low self-esteem and masking of emotions can be traced back to his childhood. With a deceased and highly revered mother and a present yet undemonstrative father, David is left to his own emotional devices. With an overbearing aunt to complete the family unit, David is adrift amid an emotionless environment that raises issues of parental responsibility. The inability of David's father to 'father' causes the sterility of David's emotions which are as brittle as his aunt's exterior. However, Aunt Ellen at least recognises the lack in David's life (19), even if his father does not. This apparent deficiency of parental affection reflects Baldwin's own search for 'what an ideal father might have been…a source of self-esteem who would have supported and guided'.[122] On one occasion, David hears his father and Ellen argue about him. Reacting to Ellen's accusations of patriarchal neglect, the father sums up his own attitudes of what it means to be a 'man', namely, *not* a 'Sunday school teacher' (20). The vague and yet obvious message of this 'definition' is not lost on David, who with his dirty dark secret, is pushed further away from his father. Attempts at 'boys-together' jocularity become as artificial as David's school-boy machismo hostility toward Joey; what passes between father and son as 'masculine candour' disgusts David (21). David exemplifies diametrically opposite values and concepts. He detests the manufactured heterosexual masculinity imposed upon him by his father and society, and yet is guilty of having acted accordingly; as Yasmin DeGout explains, the historical background of *Giovanni's Room*

[122] Leeming, *James Baldwin*, 3.

typifies the 'persistence of homophobia in America'.[123] David may have conceded to his personal homosexual proclivity, and yet the negative result of this forces him to embark upon an epic endeavour to bury such feelings. All his decisions are 'elaborate systems of evasion, of illusion, designed to make themselves and the world appear to be what they and the world are not' (24). Foucault's 'mirror' is replicated again as David attempts to construct a false heterosexual and masculine space around him, denying his more genuine homosexual desire. David's existence is overflowing with meaningless and discordant relationships with men, women, work and family. Thus David's life reflects a heterotopia that 'is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'.[124]

Fate and Giovanni

On arrival in Paris, David ironically befriends individuals described as *le milieu*, Jacques in particular, who form part of a specific homosexual section of Parisian society. This immediately introduces the binary notion of the peripheral character, the homosexual, amid the 'normality' of the cityscape and thus the formulation of social, cultural and sexual tensions. Furthermore, David acts as an 'outsider', an American in a European city. Thus he embodies one who must acquiesce to specific rules in order to penetrate the 'homotopic' site created by the homosexual Parisian community. Theirs is a site not freely accessible 'like a public place' and as Foucault explains, 'either the entry is compulsory…or else the individual has to submit to rites…one must have a certain

[123] DeGout, 'Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in *Giovanni's Room*', 425.
[124] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 47.

permission and make certain gestures'.[125] David continues to deny that he is not of their 'company' and yet paradoxically remains closely associated with the gay habitués of Guillaume's bar that contains iconic 'gay' representations such as *les folles*, unashamedly made-up young men who dress in 'improbable combinations, screaming like parrots' who always call each other 'she' (30).

In comparison, Giovanni's magnetism is 'dark and leonine' (31). The flow of attraction is gauged by a form of sexual economics as David watches and waits, unsure of Giovanni's sexual orientation. Nevertheless, 'a beginning' forms between the two men (41). DeGout argues that 'Giovanni's innocence is central to Baldwin's positive depiction of homoerotic love'[126]; however, this observation fails to accommodate the complicated relationships involving Hella and Giovanni's wife. Baldwin stated that 'bisexuality' is not the important element here[127]; it is the depiction of self-deceit and 'complex reality of such a relationship'.[128] As the crowd observes David and Giovanni from a distance, Fate personified walks out of the shadows toward David in the guise of a hideously made-up member of *les folles*. This rouged 'mummy' can be considered an external representation of David's dormant desire and acts as a fateful warning as to the hidden dangers of inflexibility and self-imposed hypocrisy.

Repeatedly described in the third person, 'It' moves in a haze of 'a gardenia-like perfume. The shirt, open coquettishly to the navel, revealed a hairless chest and a silver crucifix' (41). An excessively gaudy shirt contrasts significantly with 'sombre grey' trousers, as a consequence, the image is one of an individual intermingling elements of

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[125] Foucault, ibid.
[126] DeGout, 'Dividing the Mind: Contradictory Portraits of Homoerotic Love in *Giovanni's Room*', 427.
[127] Weatherby, *James Baldwin: Artist on Fire*, 134.
[128] Stephen Adams, '*Giovanni's Room*: The Homosexual Hero', in *James Baldwin: Modern Critical Views*, ed., Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 137.

the masculine and feminine; a parodic subversion of 'normalcy'. The head is a female caricature; the torso is boyish whilst his legs are clad in conservative masculine trousers. This amalgamation acts as a subversion of 'natural' oppositions, the combination of male and female equally challenging the binary division between heterosexual and homosexual. 'It' even manages to question Baldwin's later supposition that 'we are, for the most part, visibly male or female'.[129] However, this section of *Giovanni's Room* succeeds in highlighting what Jonathan Dollimore describes as the '*mutability* of desire'.[130] Furthermore, 'It' will succeed where David will fail because the former character's 'transgressive reinscription' of gender expectations 'appropriates reaction for resistance, thereby substituting agency for autonomy'.[131]

When 'It' stops in front of David, the purpose, it appears, is to warn David of future danger, 'for a boy like you – he is *very dangerous*' (43). David tells him to 'Go to hell', but laughing, Fate continues the metaphor; 'you shall burn in a very hot fire…Oh such fire!' (43). The spotlight slowly recedes from Fate's words and with a final condemnatory statement, Fate fades into the crowd of faces that surround them murmuring, 'You will be unhappy. Remember that I told you so' (43). This bizarre narrative space incorporates an element of the novel whereby 'the alienated are…invested with insight, becoming spiritually authentic in and through their sexual inauthenticity'.[132]

David struggles with the reality of how he feels sexually toward Giovanni and as Hella is not readily available to bolster her fiancé's masculinity, the bottom of a bottle

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[129] James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket* (London: Michael Joseph, 1985), 690.
[130] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sex, Literature and Censorship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 56.
[131] Dollimore, ibid., 324.
[132] Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 56.

seems the next best alternative with regard to immediate emotional obliteration. The physical excitement that Giovanni has created is of such tremendous force that getting drunk is the only defence against the raging storm of emotions which David hopes will ebb before 'doing any more damage to [his] land'(44). This sense of space and place becomes intrinsic to David's homosexual journey. Hella is at a considerable distance from him, as is his father and 'home'. Therefore, this unmoors David from the patriarchal and heterosexual ties that bind his psychological self. *Giovanni's Room* thus takes on figurative and literal significances as a space within which the boundaries of sexuality are challenged.

Continuing Denial of Homosexuality

Paris becomes the text's physical and metaphorical backdrop, a cityscape that embodies concepts of 'power, patronage, representation, social control, urban identity, territory, the uses of space, and everyday life'.[133] Furthermore, the Parisian streets illustrate a particular web of relationships. The 'empty and grey' streets are the same that David has walked with Hella as well as without her en route to the red-light district and 'the girls of Montparnasse' (46). At present, David joins Giovanni, Jacques and Guillaume, the two scopophilic older men tantalised by the mutual attraction between the younger men as they travel in a taxi. Thus the environment has the ability to enmesh all sexual relationships in a web of deceit. The city's spaces reflect the network of lies within the novel; the empty streets simulate the psychological journey all the characters must travel.

[133] Nancy Stieber, 'Microhistory of the Modern City: Urban Space, Its Use and Representation', *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 58 (1999), 382-391 (384).

With regard to Jean Baudrillard's 'simulacra', Paris reflects the 'city' that he describes as 'only a cold bustle, a simulacrum of appeal and warmth, it makes no contacts'.[134] Accordingly, Baldwin describes the surrounding stillness and 'light of the sky' that emphasises the city's colour and beauty and yet veils the 'dreadful corkscrew alleys and dead-end streets' along with the 'black and lone' men who sleep under the bridges (46). Additionally, Giovanni's speech is peppered with bleak and 'wintry things', of 'rats' skulking out of the shadows, of social isolation. It becomes more obvious as their affair progresses that David and Giovanni will be forced to retreat to the private and enclosed space of Giovanni's room. However, this site also has the added ability to encourage David's homosexuality, to allow him the security in which to demonstrate his new found desire for Giovanni. Thus these narrative and literal spaces become as complex and multiple as the relationships portrayed. However, Giovanni's room is still a distant phenomenon, for David still feels trapped,

> in a box for I could see that, no matter how I turned, the hour of confession was upon me and could scarcely be averted; unless of course, I leaped out of the cab, which would be the most terrible confession of all. (48)

One thing is certain, namely, David's awareness that something needs to be *confessed*. Escape is unimaginable as it would immediately alert the others to his feelings and fear. His mind is full of misreading, shame and trepidation and above all, denial. The four men continue to be isolated within the suffocating setting of the taxi cab, physically separate from the rest of humanity, equally enclosed within their own psychological worlds.

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[134] Jean Baudrillard, 'Symbolic Exchange and Death', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2002), 503.

On arrival at the café, Guillaume immediately swoops toward the young men at the bar. Their youthfulness contrasts with his age, the dirt on the walls, both figurative and physical, similarly juxtaposed with the bright white uniform of the waiter. Baldwin's description of the environment allows the tension to continue through his persistent use of binary opposites; the red and white wine, the obese chef with the diminutive female owner Madame Clothilde (51). Baldwin plays with further binaries of male/female, youth/age, and hetero/homosexuality in order to emphasise what Dollimore describes as their unconstructive endurance which duly 'renders them unstable'.[135] These continuing extremes and their instability are most apparent in the dichotomy of David's *acceptance* of his homosexuality as an essential requirement for the achievement of complete emotional self-awareness. David's complex duality originates in 'a composite of several different boys *and* girls [Baldwin] had known'; the issue for the author, and thus the reader, is to figure out 'what they were trying to reveal, what they were attempting to conceal'.[136] Baldwin continues to play with previous physical, psychological and metaphorical binaries during a significant yet brief conversation in this café scene. Jacques questions David as to when he will inform Hella regarding Giovanni, but David still refuses to 'see what there is to write about' (56). David's stark vision of *his* homosexual desire threatens his entrenched masculine heterosexual characteristics that 'powerfully organise our cultures'.[137] Enclosed emotions do not allow freedom of passionate expression. David's silence further emphasises his obvious difficulty in reaching his innermost feelings, forcing Jacques' to ironically call, 'Come out, come out, wherever you are!' (57).

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[135] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, 65.
[136] Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: a Life of James Baldwin*, 101.
[137] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, 65.

Jacques' clear advice is to allow yourself to love, and be loved in return; to allow what comes naturally to organically flourish no matter how long it may last. Only when you despise your 'self' will you consider your actions to be dirty and shameful. Acknowledging your 'self' and not playing it 'safe' will bring about a 'better' future for those concerned and not perpetuate a sense of entrapment in 'your own dirty body' (58). Such wise guidance is unlikely to be imparted by a heterosexist and patriarchal culture to individuals such as David. Thus the body becomes a space within which the personal and political are imprinted, whereby David's own self-disgust and internalised homophobia reflect the legal and cultural attitudes of mid-twentieth-century America. David and James Baldwin are both 'sexually exiled from the repressiveness of [their] home culture', searching 'instead for fulfilment in the realm of the foreign'.[138]

David's automatic thoughts of family, home and security intermingle with the shame of knowing that his feelings for Giovanni occur naturally. Giovanni does not need to rely on such socially acceptable constructs; thus his is not a 'fixed sexual identity' dependent upon cultural concepts of 'normality'.[139] David feels 'unanchored' but mistakenly links this to foreign soil, not to his conscious failure to associate his body to its homosexual desires. Before David really has a chance to escape the situation, Giovanni drunkenly coerces him into a taxi and proceeds to his 'room' (63). The respectable street at which they arrive is described as hiding the dark corridors that lead to Giovanni's gloomy room, a physical space one can consider 'as one point of entry into broader questions' about same-sex desire and 'self-awareness'.[140] As episodes of doubt have swept through David's consciousness, he now travels down to the psychological

[138] Dollimore, ibid., 250.
[139] Hall, *Queer Theories*, 158.
[140] Stieber, 'Microhistory of the Modern City: Urban Space, Its Use and Representation', 385-386.

depths of his unconscious. Tumultuous feelings are juxtaposed with the 'clutter and disorder' of the room as the two men regard each other 'with dismay, with relief' (64). As we proceed toward the conclusion of Part One of the novel, Baldwin transports the reader back to the atmosphere and pathos of the opening scene. We textually and visually depart the heat and passion of Giovanni's room to suddenly be placed amid the cold isolation of the darkened window pane and solitary figure of David as he waits the impending hour of Giovanni's execution. Despite the desperate nature of this moment, Baldwin includes a business-like conversation between David and his landlady. David's heightened emotions are paralleled with the unkempt house, his depressed thoughts juxtaposed with an inventory (69). The absurdity of this conversation is that it illustrates how life and its often mundane features carry on, whereas the beauty and individuality of Giovanni's life must end in execution. Giovanni becomes one of the few to die, David being one of the many who will perish emotionally.

Another Country

Stanley Macebuh states that the 'theme of love in *Giovanni's Room* has ceased in *Another Country* to be merely a principle of private relationships and has become the postulated dynamic of more communal ties'.[141] However, as David stands in the shadows staring out of the window, so Rufus Scott sits alone in the flickering darkness of a cinema. As David has steadily become isolated from friends and family, so Rufus has alienated himself from those he has known. As Rufus approaches Times Square, he is hungry, 'broke. And he had nowhere to go' (5). Pride prevents him from going to his

[141] Stanley Macebuh, *James Baldwin: A Critical Study* (New York: Joseph Okpaku, 1973), 72.

only friend Vivaldo, and instead he decides to try his luck at a jazz bar, passing 'small knots of white, bright, chattering people' (5), their obvious colour highlighted in linguistically positive terms. Textual parallels are drawn between the dazzling white individuals with the 'mile-high' signs of film stars and chewing gum advertisements depicting wide happy white smiles (6). Rufus has to look up to see these adverts on 'The great buildings, unlit, blunt like the phallus or sharp like the spear, [that] guarded the city which never slept' (6). As Baldwin testifies later in the novel, New York,

> was a city without oases, run entirely, insofar, at least, as human perception could tell, for money; and its citizens seemed to have lost any sense of their right to renew themselves. Whoever, in New York, clung to this right, lived in New York in exile. (267).

Such a masculinised cityscape emphasises its 'allusive value' parallel to Rufus's lack of power, how he is forced to walk beneath signs that demonstrate, for him, unattainable dreams.[142] Typically, *Giovanni's Room* is considered by critics such as Donald B. Gibson as an 'intensely personal harrowing of the author's demons while the confrontations of *Another Country* are perceived as taking place in a more public and political arena'.[143] Ostensibly this may appear to be true; however, *Giovanni's Room* offers a far subtler political commentary through its projection of place and space. *Another Country* is, as Robert Tomlinson states, 'an evolution from the earlier work', more evident in its racial and political portrayal.[144]

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[142] Baudrillard, 'Symbolic Exchange and Death', 489.
[143] Donald B. Gibson, 'Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin', in *The Politics of Twentieth-Century Novelists*, ed., George A. Panichas (New York: Hawthorn, 1971), 317.
[144] Tomlinson, 'Payin' One's Dues', 144.

Rufus's destitute situation is such that he no longer forms part of 'decent' society; white patriarchy has labelled Rufus as one of the 'fallen', an all-encompassing characterisation that locates him at the very bottom of the social pile. Rufus has become:

> One of those who had been crushed on the day, which was every day, those towers fell. Entirely alone, and dying of it, he was part of an unprecedented multitude. (6)

The 'tower' symbol recalls the fall of the tower of Babel. Legend states that its construction 'led to the confusion of languages, and the consequent dispersion of peoples', all resultant for human pride.[145] With such unmistakeable biblical overtones, Rufus is crushed physically, emotionally and spiritually, along with many others by the power of these patriarchal towers. Furthermore, his voice is rendered silent by a city that places monetary value ahead of any thing else (267); these towering constructions are part of the socio-political structure of the city, of the 'ruling ideas' of Western society.[146] Rufus exemplifies how simple it can be for an individual to become overwhelmed and eventually destroyed by the very culture and environment that surrounds him because he cannot acknowledge that 'life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life'.[147] As a consequence, Rufus's failure results from an inability to achieve a valid sense of self.[148] This relates directly to the question: 'is reality something that is determined by one's surroundings, or is it something one carries in one's head, in terms

[145] David Crystal, ed., *The Penguin Encyclopedia* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 123.
[146] Karl Marx, 'The German Ideology', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (1846; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 253.
[147] Marx, ibid.
[148] Nelson, 'James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community', 28.

of beliefs?'.[149] For Rufus, environment determines his reality as a black man with homosexual tendencies. The psychological complications arise when the individual has no place or space to call home, for, as David uses Hella and an expatriate woman Sue to 'confirm' his heterosexuality, along with Rufus, he is disgusted by the gay underworld.[150] Kevin Ohi suggests that as both novels were written before the Stonewall 'rebellion',[151] homosexuality is portrayed as a private matter, a closeted issue often derided by those closely involved.[152]

As David emotionally perishes as a result of denying his desires, we could consider how both men suffer as a result of socially prescribed notions of race and gender. Baldwin emphasises David's Anglo-American features and characteristics from the outset in *Giovanni's Room*. This is in order to demonstrate David's great inability to ignore a life-time of white cultural stimuli that constantly evince masculinity and heterosexuality as the norm. Rufus's experiences contrast in terms of race, because he has constantly been reminded of his colour by both the environment he inhabits and the people within that specific space. With regard to the duality of race and gender, the actions of others have ironically exacerbated what has historically been considered stereotypical black male behaviour.[153]

Rufus had been deeply involved with the vibrant jazz scene in Harlem and thus part of a musical community that comfortably included white jazz lovers (9), and it was here that he meets Leona, a girl 'from the South' a 'colourless face…of the Southern poor

[149] Johnson-Roullier, '(An)Other Modernism', 945.
[150] Adams, '*Giovanni's Room*: The Homosexual Hero', 41
[151] David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2004), 8.
[152] Kevin Ohi, 'I'm Not the Boy You want: Sexuality, 'Race,' and Thwarted Revolution in Baldwin's *Another Country*', *African American Review*, 33 (1999), 261-281 (263).
[153] George Edmond Smith, *Walking Proud: Black Men Living Beyond the Stereotypes* (New York: Kensington Books, 2000), 18-19, 21-22.

white' with 'straight pale hair' (10). This is an uneasy meeting of two souls in a state of emotional suspension. Rufus is unsure of his next move; consecutively, Leona states she 'ain't never going back' to the South (10). As they leave the bar with the multiracial crowd of 'erotic confusion', Rufus becomes uncomfortable 'that Leona would soon be the only white person left. This made him uneasy and his uneasiness made him angry' (11). Experience has proved to Rufus that white policemen are suspicious of, and do not look kindly on, black men, let alone black men with white women.[154] However, echoing an event experienced by Baldwin, the ever-present 'cops watched all this with a smile' as the black late-night revellers disperse.[155]

As David and Giovanni sat in a taxi's enclosed space prior to their relationship beginning, so do Rufus and Leona. Their conversation darts back and forth as they are both aware of the sexually tense atmosphere and the reader is equally conscious and alert to a myriad of emotional issues that are masked by their mundane small talk:

> 'You ain't got to worry about that, nohow. I'm a big girl.' 'Honey,' he said, 'you ain't bigger than a minute.' She sighed. 'Sometimes a minute can be a mighty powerful thing.' (11)

This implication of time effectuates a sense of silent personal history in addition to documented social history of discrimination and racism. Leona has her own story and has recently escaped a repressive Southern life, thus reminding Rufus of being kicked in the mouth by a white officer at 'boot camp' (12). Discrimination is thus seen to infiltrate the narrative to various degrees. From previous physical abuse to the present trembling of

[154] Kathy Russell, et. al., 'Dating and Mating', in *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 112-113.
[155] Baldwin, 'Here Be Dragons', in *The Price of the Ticket*, 682.

Leona's body, Rufus is alarmed and immediately presumes that his colour is the issue when it is not, 'Didn't they warn you down home about the darkies you'd find up North?' (13). Their individual histories echo the geographical divide of the American north and south as well as the social realities of the 1960s.[156] Multiracial couples were stared at on the street, as Audre Lorde testifies in *Zami*, when she and her white lover, Muriel, 'received stares and titters' (203), neither woman being sure as to whether it was because of their different colour or identical lesbian identity. However, racial attitudes do prevail, regardless of sexuality, considering that even if sexual orientation is signalled visually it is colour that people register first.

Desire and sexuality become intrinsic elements of racial discrimination with Baldwin subtly inserting historical connotations of black men with white women, and therefore how their behaviour acts as a 'negating activity' that undermines white society's racial regulations.[157] This is seen to a much larger degree in Ann Petry's *The Narrows* in the next chapter, whereby the main male protagonist confronts a wall of white prejudice regarding his interracial relationship. In *Another Country*, documented social history, from the slavery era through to the writings of Ida B. Wells, has taught Rufus the dangers should he sexually touch a white woman; 'a lynching-for-rape scenario' was an 'excuse' to 'keep the race terrorized and keep the nigger down'.[158] Political changes may have occurred since the nineteenth century and cultural attitudes may have modified, however, such basic fears continue.

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[156] Russell, et. al., 'Dating and Mating', in *The Color Complex*, 112-113.
[157] Fanon, Franz, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 218.
[158] Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 85-86, 18.

Sexualised Stereotypes

On arrival at a party, Rufus found himself glancing upward at the silver ball in the ceiling, ironically, 'always just failing to find himself and Leona reflected there' (16). Ideally, Rufus and Leona would not consider an interracial relationship; most of white 1960s 'middle America' would prefer they did not as anti-miscegenation attitudes show.[159] As though reflecting this socially desired lack of recognition of mixed colour relationships, Rufus invites Leona out onto the balcony; both an external and detached space from the rest of the party. As Leona looks up at him 'with her sad-sweet, poor-white smile', Rufus again feels a warning twinge that 'warned him to stop, to leave this poor little girl alone' (17). When Rufus goes inside for more drinks, it is the host of the party who reduces their privacy on the balcony to a racially motivated sexual game of 'getting kicks', and likewise Rufus slips into socially approved masculine behaviour of only being interested in Leona in a physical way: 'I'll see to it that she gets her kicks, he said' (17). However, Rufus disrupts straightforward notions of heterosexuality as well as homosexuality, firstly, through the socio-historical implication of his skin colour, for, with regard to Rufus and Leona,

> we might understand the lynching scenario and its obsession with the sexual dismemberment of black men to mark the limit of the homosexual/heterosexual binary…and the heterosexuality of the black male 'rapist' is transformed into a violently homoerotic exchange.[160]

[159] Werner Sollors, *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30, 156, 160.
[160] Robyn Wiegman, 'The Anatomy of Lynching', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 3 (1993), 445-467 (466).

Secondly, the narrative information of his past homosexual relationship with Eric illustrates what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has discussed regarding 'male bonding'.[161] Sedgwick argues that patriarchal structures are reliant on the 'disturbing' representation of the homosexual individual, whose very visibility provides the disciplinary requisites for normalising heterosexuality in its compulsory formation.[162]

As Rufus succumbs to a drug induced 'high', he becomes sexually violent as Leona resists and begins to cry. The scene begins to exemplify a potentially racially motivated sexual assault with sinister overtones of black male domination of a white woman as vengeful reimbursement for all the historically 'justified' violence toward black men.[163] Leona falls into her own classic categorisation of the feeble female until she suddenly 'ceased struggling. Her hands came up and touched his face as though she were blind' (19). The transformation is one from racial to purely sensual. Leona is 'blind' to his colour, her needs are unsophisticated in that she desires human contact, and sex becomes the paradigm of this prerequisite. However, Rufus cannot ignore the racial implications of their sexual union, and he becomes more aggressive in his actions:

> He wanted her to remember him the longest day she lived. And shortly nothing could have stopped him, not the white God himself nor a lynch mob arriving on wings. Under his breath he cursed the milk-white bitch and…rode his weapon between her thighs…and felt the venom shoot out of him, enough for a hundred black-white babies. (20)

[161]Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Between Men', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998)**,** 696.
[162] Sedgwick, ibid.
[163] Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930,* 82.

Rufus's poisoned thoughts and aggressive demeanour subside when Leona speaks. Her voice fills the socio-cultural void between them, yet emotions remain confused; Rufus 'wanted to hear her story. And he wanted to know nothing more about her' (20).

Gender and racial stereotypes abound during a visit from Rufus's best friend Vivaldo, a veneer of humour covering disturbing issues of discrimination. Leona jokes that Rufus is prejudiced 'against everybody'; Rufus describes Leona's ability to serve as 'a splendid specimen of Southern womanhood', and Leona herself accepts she has been taught 'nothing else' (20). They are all victims and, to various degrees, are trapped within the social pressures of the 'big world' (24). The underlying suggestion is that until there is 'a world of reciprocal negotiations' the racial battle will persist.[164] A narrative example of this is the later relationship between Vivaldo and Rufus's sister Ida. As Emmanuel S. Nelson suggests, they 'achieve at the end, at least a semblance of stability...reached only after their bitter but open and honest confrontation with themselves and with each other'.[165] This concurs with Baldwin's own assumption that the psychological and emotional problem we face as individuals is an inability to 'give':

> It is rare indeed that people give. Most people guard and keep; they suppose that That it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping, whereas what they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be. One can give nothing whatever without giving oneself – that is to say, risking oneself.[166]

David is a prime exemplar of guarding and keeping his true self from what he assumes himself to be. Accordingly, Rufus suffers a similar affliction, parallel with being

[164] Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 218.
[165] Nelson, 'James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community', 29.
[166] Baldwin, 'The Fire Next Time', in *The Price of the Ticket*, 370.

negatively influenced by 'culturally legitimated forms of subjectivity - characterized most prominently by traditional aspects of heterosexual masculinity'.[167] Additionally, Rufus has racial difference with which to contend, but ultimately, both men fail because they refuse to 'bridge the void of otherness and achieve a genuine sense of self…through one's identification with the humanity within all men and women'.[168] This is echoed most poignantly at the beginning of the novel as we witness Rufus walking alone through the streets of New York, an isolated individual among a throng of people.

Alternative Sexualities

Another Country offers a comprehensive examination of the potential for and barriers to connections across the divisions of gender and race. Lawrie Balfour argues that 'by coupling and uncoupling the main characters in a variety of sexual relationships (none of them lesbian), Baldwin probes the fears that divide them and the needs that they share'.[169] The characters of the novel become involved in myriad relationships. From Cass's affair with Eric, Vivaldo and Eric and then Ida, Rufus and Eric and then Leona and finally Eric and his long term French lover Yves, we are given 'sharp outlines of character' that 'are dissolved by waves of uncontrolled emotion'.[170] Interracial, heterosexual and homosexual relationships abound within the relative confines of New York; 'streets…and buildings' that 'can be interpreted as visible signs of social, economic, and political processes, thus

[167] Mikko Tuhkanen, 'Binding the Self: Baldwin, Freud, and the Narrative of subjectivity', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7 (2001), 553-591 (554).
[168] Nelson, 'James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community', 30.
[169] Lawrie Balfour, '"A Most Disagreeable Mirror": Race Consciousness as Double Consciousness', *Political Theory*, 26 (1998), 346-369 (368).
[170] Tuhkanen, 'Binding the Self: Baldwin, Freud, and the Narrative of Subjectivity', 558.

conceptualizing the city as a composite of representational acts'.[171] Thus, race, place and sexual identity become intertwined in 1960s America.

Homosocial affection is made evident in Rufus and Vivaldo's relationship. Despite racial differences, they are openly fond of each other in terms of masculine and social acceptability. It is the pressure of a 1960s heterosexual and patriarchal culture and predominantly racist society that forcibly restricts Rufus's ability to freely give affection to a white friend and white male or female lover. This lack of freedom stems from the McCarthy era when accusations of homosexuality were used as a smear tactic in the anti-communist campaign.[172] Often combining the 'Red Scare' with the 'Lavender Scare', on one occasion, McCarthy went so far as to announce to reporters, 'If you want to be against McCarthy, boys, you've got to be either a Communist or a cocksucker'.[173] Historians such as K. A. Cuordileone have insisted that, in affiliating Communism to homosexuality, McCarthy created an atmosphere of anti-nationalism that exploited prevalent anxieties about sexuality in order to garner support for his anti-Communist crusade.[174] There was an excessive fixation with, and unease about masculinity in early Cold War American politics; a political culture that put a new quality on strong masculine toughness and 'rendered anything less than that soft and feminine and, as such, a real or potential threat to the security of the nation'.[175] Cuordileone continues to explain, 'The power of the hard/soft opposition in political discourse lay here, in the

[171] Stieber, 'Microhistory of the Modern City: Urban Space, Its Use and Representation', 387.
[172] Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*, 149.
[173] K. A., Cuordileone, 'Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960', *The Journal of American History*, 87 (2000), 515-545 (521).
[174] Senator Kenneth Wherry, along with McCarthy, attempted to invoke some connection between homosexuality and antinationalism as, for example, when he said in an interview with Max Lerner that 'You can't hardly separate homosexuals from subversives'. Max Lerner, *The Unfinished Country: A Book of American Symbols* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 313-316.
[175] Cuordileone , 'Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960', 516.

gendered symbolic baggage that gave such imagery meaning and resonance. And in the tense climate of Cold War politics that discourse grew increasingly shrill, at times bizarre'.[176]

Such political unease becomes mirrored by Rufus's own sexual anxiety as he wanders the streets reflecting how 'a boy can be bought for the price of a beer and the promise of warm blankets' (35). As Rufus considers his next move, a 'big, rough-looking man, well dressed, white' offers to buy Rufus a drink:

> Rufus looked up and down the street, then looked into the man's ice-cold, ice-white face. He reminded himself that he knew the score, he'd been around; neither was this the first time during his wanderings that he had consented to the bleakly physical exchange. (36)

Rufus realises he 'was peddling his arse' in order to survive; leaving the street for a bar, the physical space they enter 'stank of stale beer and piss and stale meat and unwashed bodies' (36). Baldwin brings to the reader's attention many levels of city representation in which environment plays a part. Stieber details the importance of buildings and their place and space that has an effect upon 'human action, behavior, protests…and contestations'.[177] These multiple issues of human behaviour and contestations interrelate and echo not only Rufus's personal predicament but the whole nature of socio-historical attitudes toward homosexuality; a peripheral and negatively labelled sub-culture 'so strangely integral to the selfsame heterosexual cultures which obsessively denounce it'.[178] Baldwin layers the sensory imagery so the reader cannot fail to understand the position within which Rufus finds himself. Rufus joins the ranks of the unwashed and through the

[176] Cuordileone , ibid.
[177] Stieber, 'Microhistory of the Modern City: Urban Space, Its Use and Representation', 387.
[178] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, 28.

obvious sexualised transaction with the white stranger we learn more about Rufus's past sexual relationships.

Eric is someone Rufus knew 'long ago' and it is his present conversation with the 'white' man that forces Rufus to reminisce (37). 'I'm not the boy you want' are the exact words Rufus says to the man and had said to Eric, thus positioning Rufus in a spatial limbo. Past and present intermingle as Rufus wonders if Eric is also wandering the streets, and this thought compels him to contemplate his own actions. Reflections of David and Giovanni's 'story' become manifest in the heterosexual relationship that Eric gave up for Rufus and elements of Leona are similarly echoed when we are told Eric came from Alabama, a Southern boy despised by Rufus. Here, the text expands so as to incorporate a cultural geography that reflects prevailing prejudices regarding America's Deep South. The narrative is then redirected toward the individual characters Rufus, Eric and Leona whose web of relationships is as complicated as the socio-political atmosphere of the time.[179]

The question seems to be, who does Rufus despise more, Eric, Leona or himself? Rufus is incapable of recognising his own failings. He believes, rightly or wrongly, that society is against him. It cannot be denied that being black has often been a disadvantage for Rufus, and yet he fails to consider any positive or political channels through which to voice his frustration and anger. Jazz and the playing of the drums had the potential to mollify his individual psychological agitation; however, he absents himself from this locus of a collective and culturally constructive representation of blackness. Vivaldo is a worthy friend and remains the only one upon which Rufus feels he can depend,

[179] Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders – 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 140-176.

ironically, not the jazz community. Social stigma and a sense of dishonour prevent Rufus returning to his family because with them he still aims to maintain a representation of black strength and masculinity, a presumed prerequisite so as to survive American society.[180] As bell hooks explains, 'black male survival requires that they learn to challenge patriarchal notions of manhood'.[181] However, Rufus chooses to see same-sex desire as negative. He demonstrates his feelings regarding Eric's homosexuality by treating him as though he were a woman, thus ironically complying with society's masculine heterosexual practices. Rufus's version of masculinity is patriarchal and traditional in this sense. He wishes to control, be the aggressor and dictate to those around him. He loses Eric and Leona for very similar reasons; he cannot amalgamate his awareness of race *and* gender, for him they are culturally confused phenomena, homophobia and heterosexuality tending to be so enmeshed for many black men.[182]

Complications regarding Rufus's sexual identity arise when he is with Eric. When they are together, 'the hands that were meant to hold Eric at arm's length seemed to draw Eric to him; the current that had begun flowing he did not know how to stop' (39). Leona fatefully takes Eric's place in Rufus's life, their chance meeting at the club becoming more significant when juxtaposed with the relationship with Eric. Rufus discriminates against their 'whiteness' and Southern background when, in return, they appear unprejudiced toward his colour. Thus, the history of racism impedes these personal relationships. Discrimination is perpetuated, but by the one who has been its victim. Social and cultural stereotypes have been constructed concerning the young black male,

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[180] Robert Staples, *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* (Oakland, CA: Black Scholar Press, 1982), 13, 19.
[181] bell hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 64.
[182] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 220.

and Rufus accordingly performs a self-fulfilling prophecy with regard to this prescribed concept of a black male as pathologically poor, a street 'criminal' who 'gambles, runs numbers, pushes drugs, lives off women'.[183] On February 14th 1965, Malcolm X gave a speech in Detroit about the necessity to understand the negative power of racial profiling in the media. He said:

> they projected Africa and the people of Africa in a negative image, a hateful image. They made us think that Africa was a land of jungles, a land of animals, a land of cannibals and savages. It was a hateful image…. Why? Because those who oppress know that you can't make a person hate the root without making them hate the tree. You can't hate your origin and not end up hating yourself. And since we all originated in Africa, you can't make us hate Africa without making us hate ourselves. And they did this very skillfully.[184]

The concept of place becomes enmeshed with the issue of race as seen through the historical and political involvement of Africa, Europe and America in the slavery era. For Malcolm X, the savage images of Africa become metamorphosed into the urban jungle; the cannibal now akin to the 'streetcorner man'.[185] Malcolm X wanted black individuals and their communities to re-educate themselves and become more psychologically aware of media representations. Rufus fails to re-educate himself or embark on any form of affirmative action within his community as Malcolm X implored, thus leaving him vulnerable and confused in a society whose impact of stereotypes and cultural influences have hindered the possibility of any positive consensual relationships. What Rufus does not have is a positive black cultural paternal model in a black community that seeks to

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[183] hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, 51, 19.
[184] Malcolm X, *February 1965: The Final Speeches* (New York: Betty Shabazz and Pathfinder Press, 1992), 156-157.
[185] Elliot Liebow, *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 36.

make black masculinity a norm rather than a negative exception. Thus Baldwin portrays the 'city of the mind, the city perceived and imagined, the city in memory' as areas to be explored with potential to throw new light on the significance of the individual and their environment.[186]

During a later conversation, Rufus surprises himself by telling Vivaldo 'sometimes I sort of peddled my arse' (41). Rufus has assumed a form of social isolation from friends and family and the city street becomes his abode; he has 'no place to go' (42). Rufus runs away from his own self-portrayal of the 'savage', self-loathing black man, however such unconstructive self-representation follows wherever he goes. Suddenly, Rufus asks, 'Have you ever wished you were queer?' which draws an interesting response from Vivaldo:

> I used to think maybe I was. Hell, I think I even *wished* I was…but I'm not. So I'm stuck…We've all been up and down the same streets. Only we've been taught to lie so much…that we hardly ever know *where* we are. (43-44)

Those 'streets' are avenues toward alternate sexualities, exploratory routes toward desire in a mid-century American society that predominantly considers 'queer' as 'bad' and immoral, despite Baldwin's/Vivaldo's voice suggesting it can simply be an another mode of living. This is in opposition to Robert A. Bone's argument that 'Baldwin's aim…is to transcend the "chaos" of homosexuality and move in to "coherence", to heterosexuality'.[187]

Racial Tensions and Psychological Deterioration

[186] Stieber, 'Microhistory of the Modern City: Urban Space, Its Use and Representation', 388.
[187] Tuhkanen, 'Binding the Self: Baldwin, Freud, and the Narrative of Subjectivity', 569.

Potentially destructive and complex concepts of gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity have all been socially projected onto Rufus, who cannot understand Leona's seeming indifference and ignorance when she says 'time and time again –ain't nothing wrong in being coloured' (44). However, she fails to comprehend the wider social concerns and attitudes toward inter-racial relationships, she literally does not 'see' the stares, nor hear the comments. Such lack of awareness infuriates Rufus and leads to constant and reciprocal verbal, physical and sexual aggression. Rufus humiliates, terrifies and punishes Leona, seeing her as an exemplar of not only 'white woman', but after they have sex, of 'raped white woman' (45). For Rufus, Leona embodies Ida B. Wells' description of legally and socially protected 'white womanhood'.[188] The weight of racism bears heavily upon Rufus's psyche and in his rapid descent to the 'preordained' gutter, he embarks on a mission to destruct any semblance of sense he had. Fights with white men and continually being expelled from clubs merely give further strength to the bars that imprison his mind.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that an individual such as Leona subjects herself to such a violent relationship because it has become an 'internalization and endorsement, if not a cause, of her more general powerlessness and sense of worthlessness'.[189] Within the text, literary and historical metaphors are employed in accusations of wrongful behaviour; Rufus is located in the time of *Gone with the Wind*, whilst Vivaldo is labelled 'Sir Walter Raleigh – with a hard on' (48). Images of the South and slavery are juxtaposed with colonisation of the New World, both of which merge into a grand tableau

[188] Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 8.
[189] Sedgwick, 'Between Men', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 700.

of white exploitation and aggression. The ghost of such ruthless human representation haunts the lives of these three individuals. Inevitably, Rufus cannot stop just as much as the discrimination that he faces will not recede. His desire to be considered as just another individual is constantly scuppered by the fact 'You got to fight with the landlord because the landlord's *white!* You got to fight with the elevator boy because he's *white*. Any bum…can shit all over you because maybe he can't hear, can't see, can't walk, can't fuck – but he's *white!*' (57). Rufus feels that all he is good for is sex, that the myth regarding 'black male sexual prowess that' makes 'black men desirable sexual partners in a culture obsessed with sex' is all Leona desires.[190] Furthermore, Rufus feels stereotyped in this particular way by white men like Vivaldo: 'I thought all you white boys had a big thing about how us spooks was making out' (58). This is an issue raised by psychologist George Edmond Smith with regard to 'exaggerated' beliefs 'by black and white Americans alike'.[191]

With regard to the city of the mind, the city perceived and imagined, the city in memory, Leona has become lost in the labyrinth of her mind, reclaimed by a family that duly places her 'somewhere in Georgia, staring at the walls of a narrow room' (59). Rufus is socially trapped and mentally imprisoned within his self-prescribed reality, Vivaldo escaping into his own imaginary realm of creative writing. For Rufus it is already too late, the weight of the world is placed squarely on his shoulders with no hope of relief. As he and Vivaldo enter Benno's Bar, that very world is crammed between its walls. The 'advertising men' are there – or, those that stereotype and negatively represent

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[190] Cornel West, 'Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject', in *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality*, eds., Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 305.

[191] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 16. Also see George Edmond Smith, *More Than Sex: Reinventing the Black Male Image* (New York: Kensington Publishing Co., 2000), 15-16.

blackness through the media – the 'college boys' are there – or, those with social positions who gleam with ignorance – the 'lone men' watch the women, some of whom form part of inter-racial couples who have more freedom in this cramped environment than out on the streets (60).

Questions abound as to where Rufus and Leona have been leading Rufus to answer honestly, that she is in a home down South. He remembers when she was taken away:

> He remembered the walls of the hospital: white; and the uniforms and the faces of the doctors and nurses, white on white. And the face of Leona's brother, white, with the blood beneath it rushing thickly, bitterly, to the skin's surface, summoned by his mortal enemy. (65)

This memory echoes the description of a childhood visit to Washington by Audre Lorde in *Zami* (71), whereby, images of dominance and whiteness permeate the portrayal of the white waitress on an individual level to that of the social and comprehensive whiteness of the capital city. For both Lorde and Rufus, invasive discrimination is around every corner. However, unlike Rufus, Lorde re-educates herself, using her developing emotional self to forge a different space in the world; she acknowledges racism, but decides to creatively refute any control it may have in her life. Lorde returns to those very roots that had been made such a 'hateful image' according to Malcolm X, allowing Lorde to revivify and politically re-position her female heritage within American culture, a corresponding positive male tradition not readily available to Rufus.

It has been argued by Robert A. Bone that the personal experience of Eric, the white homosexual protagonist, assures a positive resolution at the end of *Another Country* , that the 'novel ends as Yves joins Eric in New York, heralding, presumably, a

fresh start for all and a new era of sexual and racial freedom'.[192] However, this is questionable given the nature of other homosexual relations in the text and the reality of wider cultural attitudes. In an interview, Baldwin rhetorically posed the question: 'What is going to happen to Yves when he gets [to America]?' his suggestion being, 'Something terrible…Yves comes and he is not prepared'.[193] Yves will have no understanding of the cultural geography of New York's streets and bars, the type of environment whose outline can be seen in the French bars of *Giovanni's Room.* Thus, the supposition that Eric is privileged with the best potential for leaving the 'chaos' behind becomes doubtful.[194] Baldwin purposefully allows for a multiple of geographical, racial and political interpretations of the title of the novel; I propose that 'another country' is psychologically an alternative space from the one you inhabit. You cannot leave chaos behind when you have nowhere to go that will accept your sexuality. Bone rather harshly describes 'the queers in *Another Country* and *Giovanni's Room*' as 'solitary cells that cannot unite…into larger collectivities…they remain imprisoned in primary narcissism, destined to live and die alone'.[195]

Bone perceived *Another Country* as 'a failure on the grand scale', but accepts that Baldwin's 'descriptions of New York contain striking images'.[196] The irony of this supposition is that 'setting' and 'urban life' is so intrinsic to a plot that Bone argues is 'little more than a series of occasions for talk and fornication'.[197] This is seen to its fullest

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[192] Robert A. Bone, 'James Baldwin', in *James Baldwin: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed., Keneth Kinnamon (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), 46.
[193] Ursula B. Davis, *Paris without Regret: James Baldwin, Chester Himes, Kenny Clarke, and Donald Byrde* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1986), 86, 29.
[194] Bone, 'James Baldwin', in *James Baldwin: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 45.
[195] Robert A. Bone, 'Novels of James Baldwin', in *The Negro Novel in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 234.
[196] Bone, 'James Baldwin', *James Baldwin: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 41-42.
[197] Bone, ibid., 41.

extent when Rufus goes to the George Washington Bridge, a physical and metaphorical structure that can join two geographical spaces and yet equally reveals the gulf in-between. Thus, reality creeps back into Rufus's previous train of thought; he now 'knew that he was never going home any more' (71). He alights from the train near the bridge, the streets are empty and yet a sense of oppression floods down from the buildings that tower above Rufus: 'the bridge was nearly over his head, intolerably high; but he did not yet see the water' (71). All previous suicidal ideas accumulate in this moment. Images of water as life-giving, thirst-quenching and soul-purifying flicker and then fade as the invasive sound of distant cars and visions of neon advertising signs intrude upon his thoughts. Rufus raises his eyes to the stars and 'thought, you bastard, you mother-fucking bastard. Ain't I your baby too? He began to cry…He was black and the water was black' (72). For Rufus as for Baldwin, it came as 'a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you'.[198] He thinks of Eric, Ida, of Leona and apologises to them all. Then Rufus feels the wind taking him from the edge; stars, bridge and water mingle into one as he falls into emptiness and the cold and the dark.

Giovanni's Room - Part 2 – Heterosexism

As one of Rufus's last visions is of the stars, David imagines that the last thing Giovanni will see before his execution 'will be that grey, lightless sky over Paris' (70). The inference is that heaven will be beyond reach for both men, that redemption is decidedly not an option for the alleged homosexual murderer or violent black man because neither

[198] Baldwin, 'The American Dream and the American Negro', in *The Price of the Ticket*, 404.

individual 'serve[s] the purpose of reproducing a homogenous (sexually and racially) nation'.[199] The physical and psychological seclusion of Rufus's suicide as he looks into the depths of the river can be juxtaposed with the image of David standing alone and staring at his reflection. Both men act at this juncture as their own respective heterotopias, in that 'they have a function in relation to all the space that remains…Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space…Or else…their role is to create a space that is other…not of illusion, but of compensation'.[200] As fictional characters, Rufus's and David's illusory space exposes, what Stefanie Dunning explains, the reader's potential failure 'to think beyond what frames our discussions of interraciality and same-sex eroticism'.[201] The alternate compensatory space of otherness is Baldwin's legacy of resistance. He lamented early in his writing that America was 'a country devoted to the death of the paradox', thus one must not erase but acknowledge the truth of life's inexorable complexity.[202]

Thus, the complicated relationship between David and Giovanni continues with David refusing to acknowledge his own truth, confessing to himself that he will soon be able to 'escape' from Giovanni, his room and homosexuality (74). Giovanni's belief is that their desire is innocent, stating, 'We have not committed any crime' (78). On the contrary, for David, American law states that homosexuality is a crime[203], and his personal attitudes reflect how 'people have dirty words for – for this situation' (78).

[199] Dunning, 'Parallel Perversions', 96.
[200] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 49.
[201] Dunning, 'Parallel Perversions', 105.
[202] Baldwin, 'Everybody's Protest Novel', in *The Price of the Ticket*, 33.
[203] Jason Pierceson, *Courts, Liberalism, and Rights: Gay Law and Politics in the United States and Canada*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), 62.

Giovanni vilifies America for its thinking that 'privacy is a crime' (79) thus illustrating the complex relationship between the personal and the political.

Baldwin insisted that sexuality was a private matter, and hence little of the subject appears in his non-fictional essays. However, Douglas Field argues, this 'sits at odds with his reputation as a key figure in gay literary history'.[204] David Leeming suggests, the novel for Baldwin was as fitting a medium for 'prophesying and witnessing as the essay was'.[205] Furthermore, Leeming describes Baldwin's novels as 'modern parables…in which the central figures are tortured perpetrators or victims of those personal limitations and larger social problems that are the author's particular concern'.[206] David has been culturally aware of general public opinion toward homosexuality; his anxiety and shame is understandable when one considers, 'in its endless struggle against homosexuality, society finds again and again that condemnation seems to breed the very curse it claims to be getting rid of'.[207] Additionally, David has felt and expressed hostility toward gay men in order to enhance his constructed 'heterosexuality', consequently showing homophobic tendencies. This behaviour serves the psychological function of expressing, or insisting, that one is not gay and 'abnormal' and thereby affirming who one is, that is, masculine and 'normal'.[208] However, Baldwin illustrates how we live 'between worlds', between a world of routines, expectations and values that are no longer feasible, and a future that has yet to be established. This gives to sexuality a peculiarly unpredictable and

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[204] Douglas Field, 'Looking for Jimmy Baldwin: Sex, Privacy, and Black Nationalist Fervor', *Callaloo,* 27 (2004), 457-480 (458).
[205] Leeming, *James Baldwin*, 122.
[206] Leeming, ibid.
[207] Jeffrey Weeks, 'Introduction to Guy Hocquengham's *Homosexual Desire*', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 693.
[208] Lee Edelman, 'Homographis', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 732.

disturbing status: a basis of agony as much as joy, angst as much as assertion, 'identity crisis as much as stability of self'.[209]

As Baldwin's work reveals 'a myriad ambiguities, contradictions and uncertainties'[210], so David occupies a psychological space of doubt and negation. A sense of the four walls of Giovanni's room closing in on him is obvious in David's desire to escape; however, physical escape is one thing, escaping from your personal and social self-definition is another. Schizophrenic tendencies emerge when David senses that within his body is another version of himself. A double life has always been led, the 'heterosexual' young man in opposition to the homoerotic individual. A heterosexist society has created a heterosexual masculinity, a culturally constructed gender identity that has been influenced by the historical emergence of gay identities. Heterosexism is defined by psychologist Gregory Herek, as an 'ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community'.[211] It functions predominantly by rendering homosexuality invisible, a phenomenon described in detail throughout her developing years by Audre Lorde in *Zami*. When this fails, a heterosexist culture will attempt to trivialise, repress, or stigmatise homosexuality, the success of which becomes manifest in David's negativity: 'there opened in me a hatred for Giovanni which was as powerful as my love and which was nourished by the same roots' (81).

The nexus between socio-cultural heterosexism and individual prejudice against gay individuals is significant in *Giovanni's Room*. It contains the fundamental

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[209] Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1985), 3.
[210] Field, 'Looking for Jimmy Baldwin: Sex, Privacy, and Black Nationalist Fervor', 457.
[211] Gregory M. Herek, 'The Context of Anti-gay Violence: Notes on Cultural and Psychological Heterosexism', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 5 (1990), 316-333.

components of the ideologies of sex and gender from which heterosexism is developed. These can be identified in David's personal-public dichotomy. He is more his true self within a personal space and never more alone when in the public domain. Herek continues to explain that if a heterosexual society continues to define the world entirely in heterosexual terms, it will be supporting the ideological underpinnings of cultural heterosexism which 'fosters anti-gay attitudes by providing a ready-made system of values and stereotypical beliefs that justifies such prejudice as "natural"'. [212] By imbuing homosexuality with a variety of symbolic meanings, cultural heterosexism enables expressions of individual prejudice. Furthermore, by encouraging invisibility among individuals, heterosexism perpetuates itself.

Place and Space

The personal-public dichotomy is seen most powerfully through David's and Giovanni's room. It epitomises every personal space David will ever know and becomes the physical extension or paradigm of the psyche. The room has the ability to make time stand still, as, when he is enclosed within it, David has no spatial awareness. The outside world has been rendered invisible to the inside, and concurrently the inhabitants of the room see only blurred images and hear distorted sounds. When Giovanni attempts to remodel the room, torn wallpaper reveals an underlying image of 'a lady in a hooped skirt and a man in knee breeches…hemmed in by roses' (82-3). They gaze down on David and Giovanni from their elevated and ostensibly heterosexual position in the room, always visible

[212] Gregory M. Herek, 'The Social Psychology of Homophobia: Toward a Practical Theory', *Review of Law and Social Change*, 14 (1986), 923-934.

during David's residence. David and Giovanni are similarly 'hemmed in', constrained by society, and physically isolated on the periphery of the city. In this sense, *Giovanni's Room* confines the focus of one's 'bondage to sexual being'.[213] The antiquated lovers in the wallpaper continue to watch in silent reproach as Giovanni and David struggle to recreate a space within which they can both live. However, David still fights his homosexual yearnings and, as he watches a sailor on one occasion, considers the young man's ability to wear and valorise his masculinity as though it were a military badge of authenticity.[214] As they pass each other, the sailor regards David contemptuously, seeing David's 'envy and desire' (89). Such a multi-layering of disparate existences complicates any hope that David will reach a satisfactory conclusion.

The literary stasis of the 'silent' city emphasises not only the binary oppositions at play in this novel but also the immense tension between them (99). Space is, according to Henri Lefebvre, 'a social reality, a manifestation in material form of social practices'.[215] Thus, the unreal silence of the city epitomises the cultural desire to marginalise and silence homosexuality. Lefebvre distinguishes between 'the use of space, the imagining of space, and the experience of space' with regard to social shaping of the modern environment.[216] This mirrors Giovanni's room. Initially 'used' for Giovanni to deposit the physical objects and detritus of his life prior to David, the room is then 'imagined' as a space to be transformed for them both to live together. Finally, the 'experience' of this space is infiltrated by the reality of life outside. David concludes:

> What a long way, I thought, I've come – to be destroyed!..I wanted to be

[213] John T. Shawcross, 'Joy and Sadness: James Baldwin, Novelist', *Callaloo*, 18 (1983), 100-111 (103).
[214] Adrienne Rich, 'Notes Toward a Politics of Location', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 644.
[215] Stieber, 'Microhistory of the Modern City: Urban Space, Its Use and Representation', 389.
[216] Stieber, ibid.

> *inside again*, with the light and *safety*, *with my manhood unquestioned*…and I wanted to rise in the morning, *knowing where I was*. (100) [my emphasis]

David psychologically craves the assumed 'safety' of heterosexuality, a wish that acts against often stronger physical desire. Security and 'light' are given precedence in the binary opposition that plunges homosexuality into darkness and danger. David's senses cry out to be included in that heteronormative community of which he has never had a positive experience.

This confusion is most manifest when David considers how Giovanni's 'touch' is analogous to passion, and yet, 'also made [David] want to vomit' (101). With regard to David's increasingly hostile behaviour it is unsurprising that Baldwin wrote this novel 'from a need to work all the "David's" he had ever known out of his system'.[217] When Giovanni is dismissed by Guillaume, his ensuing fragility causes David to feel contemptuous of Giovanni's apparent lack of strength. Masculinity here is categorised by David according to levels of emotional control. The more hysterical Giovanni becomes, the more David perceives him as feminine. David's increasingly negative view mirrors his father's attitudes and spoken opinions; that a man must be seen as masculine. From a psychoanalytical perspective, Elizabeth R. Moberly explains how in situations where the father had been verbally hostile,

> the homosexual partner was invariably identified with the father who had been hated and feared. It was thus hardly surprising that such relationships should involve hostility and instability and impermanence.[218]

[217] Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin*, 101.
[218] Elizabeth R. Moberly, *Psychogenesis: The Early Development of Gender Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1983), 40.

Alternatively, Dollimore suggests that 'the structures of identity formation…are fundamental to our existing cultural forms, they cannot be considered as stemming only from the psychoanalytic tradition'.[219] Thus, Dollimore argues, 'sexual deviance' has an earlier socio-cultural history that has influenced psychoanalysis.[220]

Thus one's social and physical environment becomes fundamental to one's interpretation of reality and one's realisation of 'self'. Baldwin figuratively plays with this notion when he portrays Giovanni's room. The very walls become the metaphorical building blocks of life that Giovanni now systematically hacks away. No job prospects, solitude and fear lace their lives as they steadily sink 'to the bottom of the sea' (109). Giovanni *becomes* the room. He may endeavour to re-create and re-present his surroundings, but this is a vain attempt to alter certain aspects of his 'self'. Giovanni's sexuality is the room. It has limitations and for David can be suffocating and confusing. To Giovanni's mind:

> The world is full of rooms – big rooms, little rooms, round rooms, square rooms, rooms high up, rooms low down – all kinds of rooms! What kind of room do you think Giovanni should be living in? How long do you think it took me to find the room I have? And since when…have you so hated the room? Since when? Since yesterday, since always? (112)

At this precise moment, they each hold a brick, emblematic of the room along with all its multiple meanings.

On Hella's return, David feels the possibility of legitimate surrender to her heterosexuality; in comparison to the enclosed and stifling nature of Giovanni's room,

[219] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 260.
[220] Dollimore, ibid.

Hella 'smelled of the wind and the sea and of space' (114). She is the living exemplar of socio-cultural acceptability and with her David tries to become re-orientated with his alleged heterosexual self. This mask momentarily succeeds as Hella fails to see through the veil of David's forced heteromasculinity as he launches into prescribed behaviour and 'seeks a refuge in the conventional'.[221] The irony is that this refuge is less stable than the brick wall in Giovanni's room. Furthermore, the text draws a parallel between Hella and Giovanni, David admitting to her, 'I love him, in a way. I really do' (127). This notion of homosocial relations is explained by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as an 'oxymoron'[222], which in turn can suitably define David; an individual within whom contradictory terms are combined.

For David, Giovanni's initial attraction had been his self-assurance and controlled attitude toward life, to a certain extent, someone not too dissimilar to David himself. This introduces the idea that 'the homosexual was choosing not another of the same sex, but himself in the guise of another'.[223] Once that 'other' becomes unrecognisable, a gulf opens up between the two. Thus, David now feels the necessity to leave Giovanni, but not for Hella. David is leaving because he is afraid of life, one that involves Giovanni. Giovanni astutely points out to David that he is only in love with his self-represented reflection of masculinity and heterosexuality; that David has a disproportionate view of his individual sexuality in that he places too much value on his manhood and capitulates to 'skewed social definitions and categorizations'.[224] The emphasis is on David's attitude toward homosexuality, and how in comparison he wishes 'to be *clean*' (134). David

[221] Stephen Adams, '*Giovanni's Room*: The Homosexual Hero', in *James Baldwin: Modern Critical Views*, ed., Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 133.
[222] Kosofsky, 'Between Men', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 696.
[223] Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, 258.
[224] Hall, *Queer Theories*, 160.

wants to wash away any remembrance of his homosexual experiences and to purge himself of Giovanni. Hella is the elected cleansing agent who further confirms Giovanni's feelings that David is 'by far, the most immoral man' he has ever met (134). However, ultimately, David does raise the issue of same-sex relationships, 'what kind of life can two men have together, anyway?' (134-5). David here is relating their relationship to the wider scope of social acceptance, while Giovanni maintains a personal and intimate attitude.

Baldwin is concerned, as John T. Shawcross suggests, 'with attempting to understand what human bondage is and how to accept it in its limiting of one's self'.[225] However, David is incapable of accepting any form of limitation and is totally trapped within his own black and white version of reality. This becomes a macrocosm of the media lies regarding Giovanni and the murder of Guillaume. The newspapers tell their own version of the truth and Guillaume's memory is miraculously metamorphosed into one of respectability, the type of decency and morality to which David has aspired (142). Ironically, the effect of the murder case, however, is to peel back David's self-imposed layers of heterosexuality; concurrently, he and Hella move out of Paris to the house mentioned at the start of the novel.

Away from Paris and removed from Giovanni, David begins to find Hella 'stale…her body uninteresting, her presence grating…I felt my flesh recoil' (149). Images of the grotesque that had initially been directed toward homosexuality now rebound onto the 'normal' heterosexual body of Hella who becomes increasingly anxious and emotionally dependent upon David. However, David cannot fulfil gendered expectations: 'I stepped away from her. She swayed, where I had left her' (152). Space

[225] Shawcross, 'Joy and Sadness: James Baldwin, Novelist', 105.

becomes a central issue whereby both characters occupy a physical and emotional place within which their personal lives are 'sheltered' from the outside world's attention and yet they are 'isolated' from each other, unable to connect.[226] Hella's response is a pitiful promise to relinquish her principles and her individuality. David's reaction is to spend the next few days with a sailor, drunk with alcohol and lust. Hella now realises to her shame that she had known for a long time, from every time they went to bed to every time David looked at her (154-5). However, David still struggles with the truth, running 'in terror of his own queer desires'.[227]

Hella leaves, and David remains in isolation as Giovanni awaits death. As David wonders about the minutiae of Giovanni's journey toward the executioner, he undresses and stares at his naked reflection in 'a large mirror…terribly aware of the mirror' (157); the start of a 'long night of penance which shapes the novel'.[228] Stripped of clothes and unprotected, David is forced to see the truth of his self once again; the discomfort he feels represents the social discomposure he felt when with Giovanni. He 'sees' Giovanni being led to his death, imagines the terror and fear. If the final prison door he must go through is 'the gateway [Giovanni] has sought so long out of this dirty world', then David was the promise, the symbolic key to another life (158). David was similarly imprisoned, but in doubt and therefore incapable of offering an alternative. Darkness surrounds both men; however, David has the power to physically leave that house and close the door behind him. Whether David has achieved an ultimate or absolute truth is questionable; despite the belief that his nakedness should be held 'sacred' (159), he physically and psychologically turns and moves toward civilisation vaguely aware that his past can

[226] Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 49.
[227] Shawcross, 'Joy and Sadness: James Baldwin, Novelist', 105.
[228] Adams, '*Giovanni's Room*: The Homosexual Hero', 139.

never be genuinely eluded. Just as the circular nature of the narrative allows no discernable exit point, so David will never be able to escape from his true sexual self. Thus, *Giovanni's Room* is more successful in its representation of sexuality than *Another Country*.

Emmanuel S. Nelson describes how all characters and protagonists in *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* are involved 'in an agonizing quest for self…and forging an identity depends largely on self-knowledge and self-awareness'.[229] This, according to Baldwin, can 'come only through suffering [that]…if endured creatively, leads to self-knowledge, which in return, can offer the possibility of achieving a genuine sense of self'.[230] The deaths of Rufus and Giovanni may textually challenge social and cultural heterosexist conventions, although as Baudrillard argues, this 'strategy is catastrophic, and not in the least dialectical', but 'things have to be pushed to the limit, where everything is naturally inverted and collapses'.[231] This can be seen in the way that Rufus, Giovanni and David become enveloped, and for the two former characters, subsumed by the community and society they inhabit. However, it could be argued that they also become buried beneath these environments. So, in response to Cyraina Johnson-Roullier's question 'is reality something that is determined by one's surroundings, or is it something one carries in one's head, in terms of beliefs?',[232] the answer has to be the affirmative, the physical space and cultural place within which we live do indeed have a major influence over our lives. Nevertheless, beliefs can change over time and our physical environment is a continual monument to society's control and power.

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[229] Nelson, 'James Baldwin's Vision of Otherness and Community', 27-28.
[230] Nelson, ibid.
[231] Jean Baudrillard, "Symbolic Exchange and Death", in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed., Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 126.
[232] Johnson-Roullier, '(An)Other Modernism', 945.

CHAPTER THREE:

ANN PETRY (1908 – 1997)

The Narrows.

Interracial Relationships – Black Men, White Women and the American Dream.

Figure 3. Radio City Music Hall – the location where Link Williams and Camilo go for a night out in New York (*The Narrows*, 132-136). Photograph taken by the author, 2007.

Introduction

Another Country introduces the issue of interracial relationships along with the attendant attitudes of the individuals concerned and society at large. Through the characters of Rufus and Leona, Ida and Vivaldo, the reader witnesses the negative as well as potentially positive outcomes of such relations against the backdrop of 1950s America. In Ann Petry's *The Narrows* (1953) an interracial relationship is also explored in detail, and unlike the stark cityscape of Baldwin's novel, Petry places her characters in suburban Monmouth, Connecticut. Despite this, the lives of Petry's characters are equally affected by mid-century racial, class and gendered issues with the added narrative inclusion of dominant images pertaining to the American Dream through various characters and settings.

The representation of white characters, by both Petry and Baldwin, is intended to 'destabilize conventional assumptions about whiteness and universality'.[233] Thus both writers confound stereotypes regarding 'black' as opposed to 'white' systems of morality in mid-twentieth-century America. Furthermore, Vernon E. Lattin describes Petry as rebelling 'against the falsification of life, the dreams, rationalizations, and illusions that distort one's grasp of reality; she rebels especially against the American Dream and all its attendant illusions'.[234] Additionally, Lattin argues that *The Narrows* 'contains a sharp criticism of the American way of life'.[235] In a similar vein, Michael Barry writes that Petry is concerned with wider social concerns, and novels such as *Country Place* (1947)

[233] Emily Bernard, '"Raceless" Writing and Difference: Ann Petry's *Country Place* and the African-American Literary Canon', *Studies in American Fiction*, 33 (2005), 87-117 (89).
[234] Vernon E. Lattin, 'Ann Petry and the American Dream', *Black American Literature Forum*, 12 (1978), 69-72 (69).
[235] Lattin, ibid., 71.

and *The Narrows* were initially commended for their transcendence of racial issues but have since been relatively ignored for this very reason.[236] Most scholarly attention has been devoted to *The Street* (1946), possibly because *The Narrows* locates the targets of oppression in different characters as opposed to one single black female protagonist. Therefore, it is imperative to accurately reposition *The Narrows* and demonstrate its depth of cultural analysis. Petry questions American society and civilisation in general as to the superficiality of its contemporaneous culture; thus, I intend to trace these images, historical stereotypes and attendant illusions throughout the novel so as to illustrate what I believe is Petry's insistence that we allow for individuality and heterogeneity and not make race, class and place homogenous concepts. I will examine the history of black racial stereotyping regarding the female characters in the novel in addition to other stock images in order to illustrate that *The Narrows* is far more than an expansive saga of black and white relations. That, as Robert Bone and Alain Locke argued, *The Narrows* is not less effective in its vision of 'man' than Richard Wright or Chester Himes.[237] Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Petry's earlier novel, *The Street*, have always been appraised as exemplars of the 'naturalistic' school of African American protest writing with *The Narrows* relegated to the background regarding social critique; however, the subtlety and deftness of Petry's characterisations in *The Narrows* does far more to '(re)configure' the black individual within American culture.[238] Moreover, Nellie McKay states in the introduction to the novel that 'Petry has played a significant role in the

[236] Michael Barry, '"Same Train be Back Tomorrer": Ann Petry's *The Narrows* and the Repetition of History', *MELUS*, 24 (1999), 141-159 (141-142).
[237] John O'Brien, ed., 'Ann Petry', in *Interviews with Black Writers* (New York: Liverwright, 1973), 153-63.
[238] Keith Clark, 'A Distaff Dream Deferred? Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion', *African American Review*, 26 (1992), 495-505 (497).

development of the strong female characters in the works of contemporary black women writers like Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, and Alice Walker'.[239]

The Narrows examines black women's historically complex position in American society and plays with several stock stereotypes. With respect to such representations, Horace Clayton maintains that 'American culture places high value on appearances, and beauty – by all means one must be beautiful – one must conform to stereotyped norms of so-called Anglo-Saxon beauty and appearance'.[240] Thus, Petry considers how the depiction of ethnicity in the American media became infused with a series of interlocked myths regarding black womanhood. This racially prejudiced ideology includes a number of debilitating stereotypes that circumvent the depiction of strong positive black female representation, constructing them as essentialised models of Otherness against which cultures are aligned.[241] During the first half of the twentieth century, the media developed several stereotypical images to respond to latent fears of African American women.[242] Furthermore, potential interracial desire had historically been a particularly sensitive subject and an issue that most whites would rather have evaded; however, the 'practice was common enough for the resulting mulatto children to become a problem in the colonies'.[243] In the post-war 'new' South, the continuing entry of African Americans into the work force compounded these fears, whereby the female slave was depicted as 'the evil Obeah Woman or loyal Mammy, the Sable Venus or Noble Slave, the foul-mouthed

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[239] Nellie Y. McKay, introduction to Ann Petry, *The Narrows* (1953; New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), xvii-xviii. Hereafter, page numbers of *The Narrows* will be cited in the text.
[240] Horace R. Clayton, 'Ideological Forces in the Work of Negro Writers', in *Anger and Beyond: The Negro Writer in the United States* ed., Herbert Hill (New York: Harper, 1966), 41.
[241] Barbara Christian, 'From Stereotype to Character', *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 1-62.
[242] Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia. < www.ferris.edu/htmls/news/jimcrow/menu.htm> [accessed: 04/05/06].
[243] Kathy Russell, et. al., 'Masters, Slaves, and Lovers', in *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 13.

whore or high-minded Christian'.[244] Such a triptych of narrow categorisation gradually became more culturally integrated, the three foremost images that slavery generated, the 'Mammy' or 'Aunt Jemima', the 'Jezebel' , and the 'Sapphire' becoming widely employed. While other images have come and gone, these three have remained consistent throughout African American history. These standard images helped to remove the blame from white males in their sexual encounters with African American women by portraying these women as the sole instigators of any relations. All three images distort African American female sexuality, as they variously portray black women as either asexual, and therefore not a threat to the wives of white men, or as hypersexual and lascivious and therefore the cause of any sexual encounter between the races.[245]

The History of Black Stereotypes

Depicted as a domestic worker with an 'all-giving nature', the Mammy image prefigured the sweet, jolly, good-tempered Aunt Jemima figure and reinforced the notion that black women want to, and are suited for, work in white homes.[246] To justify the role in which white society consigned blacks, media projections and advertising persuaded whites that black people were, in fact, content in their service. The Mammy was traditionally loud, big, and dark, submissive to her master and yet was 'needed as an image, a surrogate to contain all those fears of the physical female'.[247] Then there is 'Jezebel', the seductive black girl who indiscriminately entices men into her bed. The representation of black

[244] Jenny Sharp, *Ghosts of Slavery: A Literary Archaeology of Black Women's Lives* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xxv.
[245] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, 6-7.
[246] Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 2.
[247] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, ibid.

women as overtly sexual by nature is an enduring stereotype, seen most effectively in film posters (Figures 4 and 5 shown below left and right).[248] The evocative descriptions related with this stereotype and media depiction are particular in their motivation; seductive, exotic, worldly, captivating, dangerous, and lewd. Historically, Southern white women, as a category, were portrayed as models of self-respect, self-control, and modesty, even sexual purity, but black women were often portrayed as innately promiscuous, even predatory.[249] K. Sue Jewell conceptualised the Jezebel as a Tragic Mulatta, with, 'thin lips, long straight hair, slender nose, thin figure and fair complexion'.[250] However, this hypothesis is too restrictive. The Tragic Mulatta and Jezebel may share the characteristics of being sexually provocative, and both are antithetical to the desexualised Mammy caricature; nonetheless, it is a mistake to assume that only, or even mainly, pale-skinned black women were sexually objectified by a larger American society. From the early 1630s to the present, black American women of all shades have been portrayed as 'prurient stereotypes'.[251]

The final mythical image is that of 'Sapphire', the witty, emasculating woman who is typically illustrated in dominant pose.[252] This stereotype is strong and independent and often considered unfeminine; Barbara Christian describes her as having similarities to the

[248] Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia.
[249] K. Sue Jewell, *From Mammy To Miss America And Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy* (London: Routledge, 1993), 46.
[250] Jewell, ibid.
[251] Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 118.
[252] Marilyn Yarbrough and Crystal Bennett, 'Cassandra and the "Sistahs": The Peculiar Treatment of African American Women in the Myth of Women as Liars', *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* (2000), 626-657 (634-655).

Mammy, however 'Sapphire is not so much maternal toward white folks as she is unfeminine in relation to black men. To them she is cold, hard, and evil'.[253] The later mid-century antithesis of social concepts of black womanhood is the mythical figure of the black matriarch viewed most particularly through the white patriarchal lens of the Moynihan Report; 'she' is an amalgam of black female characteristics made negative in masculine terms.[254]

Stereotype and mythical images are intrinsic within what Roland Barthes suggests is a system of communication. He proposes that 'myth' be distinguished as a form, not as an idea and one conveyed through a particular discourse. Barthes continues to advocate that anything can pass from a closed, mute existence to an oral state and is open to appropriation by society; that is, a thought is formed into words and then becomes accessible to anyone. He continues to propose that there are no eternal myths, for it is 'human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language'.[255] Also in this vein, Hortense Spillers argues: 'Let's face it, I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches"..."Brown Sugar", "Sapphire"..."Earth Mother"..."Granny"..."God's Holy Fool"'.[256] Spillers defines the portrayal of black women as a locus of multiple identities, an interweaving of tradition and history, power and privation. This representation manifests itself in the novels of black female authors such as Petry and within the plays of Alice Childress. In particular, *The Narrows* and *Wedding Band* (1966) portray multifaceted characters that resist

[253] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, 77.
[254] Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington DC: U. S. Department of Labor, 1965).
[255] Roland Barthes, 'Mythologies', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology* eds., Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (1957; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 1119.
[256] Hortense Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 656.

constant negative stereotypical representations and depict the profound impact of cultural and socio-political conditions on the lives of black women. The characters subvert and resist the 'myth' that 'human history' has converted into 'reality'. Inherent to the work of these authors are issues of race, gender and class, their female characters speaking in a plurality of black voices. These black women examine the extent to which they have the liberty to pursue their selfhood within the confines of a sexist and racist society. As Stuart Hall writes, these types of stereotypical images are deeply ambivalent; they are both comforting and threatening to the white observer. Either way, they provide a series of convenient roles for the white representation of black people. All of them play into white fantasies of moral, spiritual and mental superiority.[257] With specific regard to *The Narrows*:

> Stereotypes…carry entire realms of association with them…that form a subtext within the world of fiction. In the case of works claiming to create world of whole cloth, such a subtext provides basic insight into the presuppositions of the culture in which the work arises and for which it is created. [258]

The Narrows depicts a white culture in the early 1950s that purposefully provides a series of convenient black stereotypes in order to reposition the black community at the base of the social class system (372-378). As a fictional world, Petry's narrative is also an insight into American social and racial presuppositions made most apparent when Link Williams's and Camilo Sheffield's interracial love affair is revealed. Both black and white communities, regardless of class or gender, cannot accept their union. Thus the

[257] Stuart Hall, 'What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?', in *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video*, ed., Valerie Smith (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 123-134.
[258] Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 27.

reader is faced with a complex composition of historical and contemporary male and female stereotypes that echo those of slavery as well as modern media representations and consequently, demonstrate Petry's discrediting of such stock images and cultural signs through her continual confusion of racial expectations.

The Narrows

In order to debunk preconceived myths of the black 'woman', I want to examine how Petry uses the African American strategy of signifying, as proposed by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Petry repudiates ubiquitous stereotypes and media representations and in order to do so, she subverts the negative and debilitating facets of cultural categorisation by revealing alternate aspects of black womanhood. In this sense, Petry is involved in:

> a rhetorical act that is not engaged in the game of information giving…[but] turns on the play of a chain of signifiers, and not on some supposedly transcendental signified.[259]

This is a deconstructive strategy, aimed at identifying levels of meaning and expression that might otherwise remain mediated, or buried beneath the surface. 'Signifying' deciphers the double-voiced nature of a black narrative and highlights the two levels upon which the text speaks. Firstly, Petry employs a contemporary and historical tropological revision with a difference that is most apparent through the portrayal of her black characters. Secondly, *The Narrows* is a speakerly text, one that represents the

[259] Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 905.

speaking black voice in writing. This is illustrated primarily by means of Abbie Crunch's and Link's continuous retrospection and introspection.[260] Gates argues that black texts function as signifying revisions of white canonical texts and other black texts in a spirit of parody and pastiche. Thus, Petry appropriates Shakespeare, Marlowe and Tennyson[261], in addition to 'naturalistic' narratives containing tragic and 'grim portraits of black life' such as *Native Son* (1940) and her own earlier narrative *The Street*.[262] Novels of this 'naturalist' genre also underscore the social expanse that divides both the black world from the white: 'These two worlds do not know each other and wish to make no effort in this direction'.[263] As an alternative, *The Narrows* demonstrates Petry's emergent distinctive black female vision that depicts white and black female characters that exist textually in order to re-evaluate and modify preconceived myths of white and black womanhood. Petry succeeds in doing this by re-presenting women as autonomous personalities without enclosing them within mythical boundaries or patriarchally prescribed relationships.

Abbie Crunch, one of the main black female characters, is also a widow and the adoptive mother of Link Williams. The novel begins and concludes with Abbie, who, along with other characters, retrospectively considers a past series of unfortunate episodes. In this sense, as Margaret McDowell observes, 'no single protagonist clearly

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[260] Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxv-xxvi.
[261] Ann Petry, *The Narrows* (1953; New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 124-127. Hereafter, page numbers cited in the text.
[262] Robert J. Butler, ed., *The Critical Response to Richard Wright* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 167.
[263] Jean-Francois Gournadoo, *The Racial Problem in the Works of Richard Wright and James Baldwin*, trans. Joseph J. Rodgers Jr (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 75.

dominates; the novel remains…the saga of a community'.[264] Within this community, Abbie is initially perceived as resentful and solitary as she recalls her despised neighbour and adversary, Bill Hod. As Abbie is described as short, plump and respectably attired, Bill is lean, arrogant and domineering. His black masculinity is immediately exemplified as the benchmark with which all ensuing male characters, regardless of colour, will be compared. Bill maintains control in a scene whereby Abbie and her friend Frances attempt to drag eight year old Link from Hod's bar, 'The Last Chance' (3). These two respectable ladies scrabble on the floor of a bar and are surprised to find there 'was no dirt, no dust' in this female-free zone (3). Thus, Petry narratively plays with a chain of signifiers as she transforms the arrogant Bill Hod into the sanitary passive purveyor while the reputable women actively wrestle with a boy in a bar.

This is Dumble Street and 'the signs on the buildings dispelled the illusion of beauty' (4). Abbie considers how the 'signs tell the story of change' (5) in an area that has known several ethnic groups. Polish, Irish and Italian immigrants have moved in and out of what is now described as The Narrows, a district that has been unimaginatively linked to its black inhabitants; Little Harlem, Dark Town and Niggertown having been previously used.[265] Petry 'excels…in her use of concrete detail'[266], when one considers the ironically positioned red neon sign stating The Last Chance, which demonstrates neighbourhood identification; *The Narrows* is thus imbued with disquieting discrimination and segregation. The community as a whole continues quietly in its daily

[264] Margaret B. McDowell, '*The Narrows*: A Fuller View of Ann Petry', *Black American Literature Forum*, 14 (1980), 135-141 (136).
[265] Similarities may be drawn with Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (London: Penguin, 1980), Brewster Place being an 'afterthought' of an area that was initially populated by Irish, then Mediterranean and eventually by a 'multi-colored "Afric"' community, 1-5.
[266] McDowell, '*The Narrows*: A Fuller View of Ann Petry', 137.

life overseen by a large maple tree locally known as The Hangman. Its inclusion acts as a marker of passing time and changing seasons, of communal roots and tradition. This becomes especially poignant as the tree physically occupies a space near Abbie's house and Bill Hod's bar, Link's two main domiciles. As McDowell suggests, such narrative 'expansiveness and flexibility' serves to elaborate 'theme through the use of extended metaphor'[267]; the Hangman acts as a historically silent witness to the injustices against black people.

Economics and the American Dream

In an interview with Mark Wilson, Petry discussed her own small community of Old Saybrook in New England and described her family as inhabiting a 'separate private world that had nothing to do with the town'.[268] This personal memory of never having 'a true sense of belonging' stems from a black familial history of slavery that has no connection with white New England expectations.[269] However, Petry felt that Abbie Crunch, along with the Treadway's butler Malcolm Powther, came close to being the archetypal New Englander.[270] Thus environment becomes significant with regard to character representation, since Abbie's house has 'an air of aristocracy' and suitably represents its fastidious owner (6). Yet Abbie still turns a critical eye onto herself wondering whether others see her as 'Shabby? Old? Like the toothless old women…of the…The Narrows? The curve of their backs, the dark wrinkled skins…made her think of

[267] McDowell, ibid., 135.
[268] Mark K. Wilson, 'Ann Petry. The New England Connection', *MELUS*, 15 (1988), 71-84 (77).
[269] Wilson, ibid., 81.
[270] Wilson, ibid., 83.

crones and witches' (7). Abbie complicates issues of how black women are stereotyped and the class system that they inhabit. She categorises the old women without considering that there may be little difference in age and that only a case of economics separates them. Juxtaposed with Abbie is Powther, whose medium brown colour and straight nose becomes Abbie's chosen exemplar of the 'correct' type of black lodger.

Ironically, Powther will fatefully put in place a series of circumstances that will conclude with Link's downfall. Powther's seductive wife, Mamie, his misguided loyalty to the Treadways and accompanying desire to elevate himself above other blacks will prove disastrous. When drafting *The Narrows*, Petry jotted down the following thoughts in a notebook: 'Fate as character, good or evil'.[271] Powther, along with other characters, fulfils this position. Thus, economics and social aspirations form the foundation of many prejudices in the novel. Link, however, is the one who attempts to make Abbie understand that appearances can be deceptive, that just because Powther is a 'polishedlooking person' does not necessarily mean that his family are too (14). Further economic inconsistencies are illustrated through the well educated Link who chooses to work behind Hod's bar with Hod himself correctly characterised by Abbie as, 'illegal, immoral, illicit' and 'dangerous' (14). Keith Clark explains how the 'African-American protest novel of the 1940s and 1950s maintained a symbiotic relationship with the mythic American Dream', arguing that *The Narrows* deviates from this interpretation.[272] However, the underlying economic urgency, the influential inclusion of the *Monmouth Chronicle* photographer, Jubine, and owner, Peter Bullock, continually force this novel to focus upon monetary lack, need and greed. It may not be as strident in its social message

[271] Don Dingledine, '"It could have been any Street": Ann Petry, Stephen Crane, and the Fate of Naturalism', *Studies in American Fiction*, 34 (2006), 87-106 (96-97).
[272] Clark, 'A Distaff Dream Deferred? Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion', 495.

as *The Street*, but ultimately its intentions are clear; the American Dream, and all it entails, permeates the lives of all characters regardless of colour or class. Ralph Ellison declared that, with regard to the American Dream, 'the values of my own people are neither 'white nor "black", they are American'.[273]

With regard to the white female characters in *The Narrows*, economics and consumerism prevail and thus detail the new purchasing power and possibilities of the 1950s. Camilo may appear an exemplar of generations of inherited wealth; but the Treadway Munitions fortune was built more recently by her father. However, the secondary character of Lola Bullock epitomises a historical period of time that witnessed an increase in technological production and urbanisation which duly continued the enforcement of gender roles. In her study of economic and social opportunity for blacks and whites, and the expectations both 'races' have for the pursuit of happiness, Jennifer Hochschild defines the American Dream as a set of 'tenets about achieving success'.[274] The 'dream' being 'the great national suggestion' that anyone, with hard work according to the rules, has a reasonable prospect of succeeding in life.[275] The white Treadway 'rules' appear to be most dominant throughout the novel, with black individuals having an equal desire with regard to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness but maintaining a peripheral position to such apparent white supremacy. However, these white rules crumble under the weight of their immorality leading toward a sense of uncertainty, after all, terms such as 'life', 'liberty' and 'the pursuit of happiness' are, according to Michael

[273] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 270.
[274] Jennifer Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 15.
[275] Hochschild, ibid., 171.

Schudson, 'no less ambiguous and no less mythic than the phrase "American Dream" itself'.[276]

This lack of morals and ambiguity is further pursued by Petry through the representation of the Bullocks. As the name suggests, Peter Bullock 'is the castrated American male' of the novel[277], in direct contrast to the Apollo-like figure of Link. Peter and Lola Bullock live in a show home designed to be efficient 'to enable housewives to have more free time to pursue their own interests…to achieve higher standards of cleanliness…while allowing more time for child care'.[278] The antithesis of this according to Elaine Tyler May is how many women reported 'feeling trapped and isolated, facing endless chores of housekeeping and tending to children'.[279] However, despite epitomising 1950s consumerism, the Bullocks do *not* have the required amount of children and are massively in debt. Their 'dream house' fails to advocate the expectations of the nuclear American family and American Dream, thus, Petry again 'turns on the play of a chain of signifiers, and not on some supposedly transcendental signified'.[280] Lola may appear superficial in her taste and her desire for more possessions, however, when Peter is blackmailed by Mrs Treadway, Lola tells Peter to stand up to her. Hence, Lola is not what Lizabeth Cohen describes as an 'isolated ideal' type of consumer, but epitomises 'ever-shifting categories that sometimes overlapped, often were in tension, but always reflected the permeability of the political and economic spheres'.[281] Furthermore, Cohen

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[276] Michael Schudson, 'American Dreams', *American Literary History*, 16 (2004), 566-573(566).
[277] Lattin, 'Ann Petry and the American Dream', 71.
[278] Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 153.
[279] Tyler May, ibid.
[280] Gates Jr., 'The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 905.
[281] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 8.

insists that equality was too often omitted in the headlong pursuit of a mass consumption society and that as a result of the G. I. Bill, financial institutions that operated the aid of home-ownership discriminated against women and often excluded blacks.[282]

What is evident is how Petry complicates notions of 1950s home-ownership and family by depicting a range of female characters that do not conform to 'type'. Abbie is black, a widow, and an adoptive mother and yet a respectable home owner. Frances Jackson is a successful self-employed business woman and local employer. Camilo is white, married, and moneyed and in love with a black man, and Mamie Powther leaves her husband to fulfill the role of mother to their children. Petry portrays Abbie and Frances as autonomously successful and financially independent black women and in one sense it could be argued that they subvert the quest for the American Dream and fulfil their own version of it. Keith Clark suggests that

> what Petry's women attain is not emblematic of what the American Dream should produce in its most sanguine form. But [Abbie and Frances] do 'get over', and their actions and choices appear free of the author's judgment.[283]

In contrast, it is Peter, the white male, who is imprisoned and as Betty Friedan argued, he embodies how 'it has somehow been understood that men must be thrust into the future, [however] the pace has always been too rapid for man's identity to stand still'.[284] Modernity and media manipulation have enforced an uncertain identity that cannot 'take the image of the man they wanted to be from their fathers'.[285] Hence Peter will unsuccessfully strive to achieve the ideals of his abolitionist grandfather in a society

[282] Cohen, ibid., 166.
[283] Clark, 'A Distaff Dream Deferred? Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion', 502.
[284] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1992), 78.
[285] Friedan, ibid.

where money will prove to have more power than the written word. In consequence, Petry highlights the enmeshed nature of black *and* white communities and particularly how the actions of individuals such as Bullock will influence the lives of Link and Camilo. The principles implicated in Petry's retrospective attempt to retell the same episodes from other perspectives, while surveying the conditions and experiences that have shaped these opinions, is akin to the snap-shots of life that Jubine takes. Employing numerous perceptions as a structural and textual device is, as Keith Clark suggests, an illustration of 'the black community in its totality, harboring several stories'.[286] If the reader emotionally observes all that occurs in The Narrows, then Jubine is the impassive recorder of such events, the one who 'bears witness'[287], since he 'serves as the conscience and critic of the American Dream'.[288]

Colour Confusion

As Link waits for Jubine, he thinks about the shapely and darker-skinned Mamie Powther in conjunction with the 'warm yellow flesh' of a prostitute and Madam named China. Mamie has large voluptuous proportions which equally serve to place her in the Mammy and Jezebel categories.[289] She is alluring, vibrant and acts as a textual counterpoint to the figure of Abbie. Petry explained that 'what makes it particularly interesting is the dynamics of the interaction between these two…because Abbie Crunch…is offended by

[286] Clark, 'A Distaff Dream Deferred? Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion', 503.
[287] Barry, '"Same Train be Back Tomorrer": Ann Petry's *The Narrows* and the Repetition of History', 144.
[288] Lattin, 'Ann Petry and the American Dream', 72.
[289] Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985), 38.

Mamie Powther'.[290] Such distinctions between female forms are further complicated with the arrival of Camilo, whose bodiless voice is the first thing that Link hears through the 'white' fog which initially creates a culturally invisible cloak around them both. The fog is 'thick', suggesting social impenetrability. The 'visibility' is 'zero', as is the viewpoint of the whole community when this socially and racially unacceptable relationship comes to light (57).

Camilo is being chased by the severely disabled and hideously natured Cat Jimmie and Link begrudgingly steps forth to help; his first impression of her is that she is 'a younger fairerskinned thinner more beautifully put together edition of Mamie Powther' (60). At this stage, Camilo acts as a 'tragic mulatta' figure, in that Link believes she is a black woman capable of passing for white. The tragic mulatta stereotype held that mulattoes occupied the margins of two worlds, fitting into either, yet accepted by neither. Although clearly more myth than reality, the mulatta/o was rendered tragic in the mind of a white society that reasoned that the greatest tragedy was to be almost but not quite white and thus a racial gulf away.[291] Camilo is alien to the area; it had been Jubine's photographs in a magazine that had aroused her curiosity (62). Thus the scope of *The Narrows* is such that Petry's lens 'becomes more panoramic; other stories encroach' on Link's life 'and take on a tension and drama all their own'.[292]

Now ensconced in a bar, Link fails to see what the waiter's 'all-embracing analytical stare' unveils, namely, that Camilo is white (68). Complex cultural connotations are suddenly revealed by Link's inability to identify this fact. Again, Link considers black women he has met or known who have been fair-skinned and pale-eyed,

[290] Wilson, 'Ann Petry. The New England Connection', 83.
[291] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 3.
[292] Clark, 'A Distaff Dream Deferred? Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion', 503.

and especially how they were part of their black community: 'He studies the girl again. White? Colored? Her hair had a wonderful shimmer but – so did Abbie's' (70). Link acts as Petry's decoder of African American stereotypes, demonstrating that 'black' has many shades and definitions. At the same time, Camilo is equally categorised by Link: 'The lady is white. That surprised condescension in the voice is an unmistakable characteristic of the…female Caucasian (72). Despite this, they meet again thus allowing interracial relations a new possibility. Akin to Rufus Scott, with a wealth of racial history at his fingertips, Link still embarks upon a relationship which is in direct opposition to American socio-cultural traditions – what Audre Lorde describes as the 'master's' structure.[293] In this sense, Link does not buy into the master's construct and thus he will 'stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled' in both his own and within the white community.[294] Bonnie TuSmith explains Lorde's argument, that in order to 'attain freedom from oppression one must be strong enough to reject the crutches offered by the master that keeps one down. The master's tools, however, are seductive'.[295] Freedom can only be accomplished by recognising one's humanity in common with others but with the added impetus of a strong community, for 'without community there is no liberation'.[296] However, with regard to *The Narrows*, the individuals within an already subjugated black community have been sufficiently seduced by the American Dream, just as Link has become entranced by Camilo, and thus the community lacks the required effectiveness to aid Link, who blindly believes, 'How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, That has such people in't' (97).

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[293] Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider*, 112.
[294] Bonnie TuSmith, *All My Relatives: Community in Contemporary Ethnic American Literatures* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 94.
[295] TuSmith, ibid.
[296] Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider*, 112.

These are Miranda's words spoken in Act V scene 1 of *The Tempest* at the moment when Prospero is prepared to relinquish his wand and set Ariel free, knowing that his work is completed and that Miranda will bear his sovereignty. Miranda and Ferdinand will tackle this Brave New World with a dual sense of insecurity and anticipation. It is no Utopia that this place offers, but rather a virginal, unchartered landscape.[297] The association with Link and Camilo is unmistakable; they too are about to embark on an unknown journey toward a potentially fearsome and unchartered landscape, enchanted by each other to such an extent that love and desire will taint their vision. Link and Camilo would normally be fully aware of the racial implications of being involved in an interracial sexual relationship, however, emotions rather than political awareness will prevail.

Camilo Williams

White women involved in interracial relationships have been sexually typecast by white society. Interracial sex has generated its own set of stereotypes. Black men who sleep with white women tend to be singularly categorised as a dangerous 'other', a label that was assigned variously to black men in the South.[298] Archetypes pertaining to white miscegenous women basically represent a mode by which society can comprehend behaviour that they condemn with a certain sense of anxiety. The 'Slut' is a white girl

[297] *The Tempest* has had numerous Postcolonial and Feminist readings; notably with Caliban as the enslaved 'other', Prospero as the white supremacist and Miranda as embodying the suppressed female. For example, Laura E. Donaldson, 'The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading', *Diacritics*, 18 (1988), 65-77; Steven Marx, 'Progeny: Prospero's Books, *Genesis* and *The Tempest*', *Renaissance Forum*, 1:2 (1996); Allen Carey-Webb, 'National and Colonial Education in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 5 (1999), 3-39.
[298] Russell, et. al., 'Masters, Slaves, and Lovers', in *The Color Complex*, 23.

who willingly sleeps with 'a man of colour', and thus Camilo goes against Treadway family and conventional socio-cultural wisdom.[299] Camilo is 'perceived to be an affront to conventional codes of racial conduct' and as far as society is concerned, as a white woman with a black man she 'is constitutionally deficient, morally permissive, or simply' a sexual freak.[300] Though the *legal* consequence of such female behaviour has ended and social significance diminished, the stereotype remains; and what remains is a double standard that exists around interracial sex. Anglo-American society's indignation over miscegenation has 'its origin in racist concern about the contamination of the White gene pool'[301], and several historical theories have been offered to account for this racial/sexual disparity:

> White women's mulatto children disrupted the patriarchy…Mulattoes in the slave quarters were an economic asset, in the form of slave property, but a racially mixed child in the 'big house' created havoc and shame.[302]

With regard to wider society, Camilo socially positions herself amid disturbing racial complexities concerning *black* men and *white* women. By choosing Link as a sexual partner rather than her white and rather insipid husband, Camilo is culturally translated as putting her sexual satisfaction before her racial unity.

Link is positively represented as an exemplar of attractive black masculinity. He is educated, traveled and more importantly, is made to relate more to Camilo on an emotional level than her white husband called Bunny. Love, lust and desire have

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[299] Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 87-88.
[300] Werner Sollors, *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 142, 503.
[301] Russell, et. al., 'Masters, Slaves, and Lovers', in *The Color Complex*, 14.
[302] Russell, et. al., ibid., 22.

transpired to soften Link's view of the world. Poetry and 'a pink-and-red-orange glow' pervade the meeting between Link and his 'love', his Helen of Troy, as Petry ironically employs and appropriates traditional and canonical images of doomed lovers. When Link quotes, 'make me immortal with a kiss' (126), he conjures up Helen of Troy, who was perhaps one of the most inspiring female characters in all literature, ancient or modern as an exemplar of absolute beauty. However, with what Robert Bell describes as 'little character development', Helen is regarded as a pawn of the gods.[303] Next, Romeo and Faustus are quoted concurrently, two characters that perish prematurely. Finally, the sudden inclusion of 'Frankie and Johnnie' (127) is especially foreboding considering Frankie shoots her lover Johnnie regarding his unfaithfulness and is then accused of 'murder in the first degree' and imprisoned.[304]

However, Link and Camilo's meeting is laced with desire and whilst en route to New York, they intermittently discuss their pasts forcing Link to reflect on being forced to take part in a school play as 'Sambo' (130), a stock image depicting 'no account-niggers, those unreliable, crazy, lazy, subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens…or butchering the English language'.[305] This is juxtaposed with a car park attendant's lack of interest in Link's colour who concludes that 'Money transforms the black male. Makes him beautiful in the eyes of the white female' (132). Economics continue to echo during their trip to Radio City; Camilo says that the tickets are free which does not convince Link. The show contains 'a pair of

[303] Robert E. Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
[304] Daryl Cumber Dance, *From My People: 400 Years of African American Folklore (An Anthology)* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2002), 114-115.
[305] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Viking, 1973), 8.

dancing colored comedians' which mentally transports Link back at school and the play in which he refused to take part (133), thus interweaving past and present as a cultural perception of blackness is performed on a theatre stage. Such is the importance of racial memory, and through subverting stock images, by questioning and highlighting American modes of belief, Petry revisions the dominant racial ideology. In a similar vein, Barry argues that *The Narrows* 'often considers what might have been' and illustrates how

> all humans in Petry's world are prone to imperfection, and while the discovery of patterns of oppression offers structure to our interpretations, it also, on some occasions, excuses individuals from any part of the blame, and, on others, expresses simple prejudice.[306]

The city streets contain signs that subtly pervade their respective black and white consciousness. Shops and advertisements signify an affluence not known in The Narrows, and are additionally significant in their use of racial stereotypes. Camilo peruses the shop windows, and gazes at a 'red evening gown…on one of those incredibly thin, very natural-looking figures' (146). Concomitantly, Link conjectures:

> Well, Sambo may still be sittin' in the sun, sleepin' in the sun in Radio City, but Mrs Sambo now sits in the windows of…the exclusive dress shops. Some skilled …hand makes all these store dummies look like colored women, the hair frizzed, the skin color no longer pink and white but the offwhite of a high yaller. (147)

Through an ironic interweaving of signs, and 'a rhetorical act that is not engaged in the

[306] Barry, '"Same Train be Back Tomorrer": Ann Petry's *The Narrows* and the Repetition of History', 150.

game of information giving'[307], Petry implies that 'Mrs Sambo' is Camilo, a typical allegation and racial epithet levelled at a white woman with a black man. The dummies are made exotic, the choice of skin colour paradoxical in historical terms because 'high yaller' skin in the slavery era was not only an intraracial issue of contention, but often highly coveted with mulattoes bringing 'the highest prices on the slave market'.[308] Petry plays on a chain of signifiers by narratively juxtaposing 'exclusive dress shops' with 'offwhite' dummies that resemble mulattas in order to sell products to a white clientele. Here Petry powerfully conveys the depths of psychological consciousness through Link's interior monologue depicting his reminiscence of the school play with the emotional conflict that he feels on observing the Radio City show and the expensive boutiques. Thus, Link's juxtaposition of memory and present experience is analogous to contemporary issues of race, place and class; Petry, again, effectively demonstrating what Lattin describes as the 'corrosive elements' of materialism and racism.[309]

(Extra)-Marital and Platonic Relationships

Camilo's behaviour raises suspicion; however, Powther has marital issues of his own in the shape of Mamie and Bill Hod. Mamie constantly tests her husband's patience, positioning him in her considerable shadow. Hence, Powther is the antithesis of perceived notions of black masculinity. Shirley Hill argues that 'men from racially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds often focus inordinately on physical

[307] Gates Jr., 'The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the Sign and the Signifying Monkey', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, 905.
[308] Russell, et. al., 'Masters, Slaves, and Lovers', in *The Color Complex*, 18.
[309] Lattin, 'Ann Petry and the American Dream', 71.

aggression, sports, and violence as routes to manhood, along with control over and exploitation of women'.[310] One reason for this phenomenon is given by Michael Datcher as the black man's perceived inability to provide their female partners with the 'picket fence' dream of stable, middle-class family life.[311] However, Petry characterises a variety of black masculinity and moves away from such generalisation. Powther does not resort to physical aggression or exploitation; instead, he attempts to provide a homeliness and sense of security. He presses and mends Mamie's clothes, transfers his skills to telling the children stories and generally assumes the maternal role in the household acting in direct opposition to the likes of the Bill and Link.

Cultural myths of black manhood become subsumed and subverted in a text that also incorporates the act of storytelling. Petry explained the source of this as being her father, a 'great storyteller' throughout her childhood and one who influenced the formation of characters such as the Major and Powther.[312] Fairy tales and dream marriages are portrayed as an illusion in *The Narrows*, with the subtext of the novel being that one does not pander to historical presuppositions of a decade of nuclear families and idealistic marriages. Powther may make up stories of fearless heroes and wondrous heroines that live 'happily forever after', however, his reality is somewhat different (176). Mrs Treadway and Abbie are widows, Camilo and Bunny, along with Lola and Peter Bullock, have childless sham marriages and Bill Hod encroaches upon the Powther union; all that remains are the fairy tales. Thus, marriage is illustrated in several ways in the novel, showing that the realities were far removed from the constructed ideal.

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[310] Shirley A. Hill, 'Gendered Violence: racial Oppression and the Assault on Black Women', in *Black Intimacies: A Gender Perspective on Families and Relationships* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005), 184.
[311] Michael Datcher, *Raising Fences: A Black Man's Love Story* (New York: Riverhead, 2001), 3, 235.
[312] Wilson, 'Ann Petry. The New England Connection', 71-72.

Historical fantasy is confused with reality. This is especially true when society ponders on the 'nuclear' institution, the family. Among the most effective myths that pervade contemporary society is the notion that divorce, domestic violence, and single parenthood are recent phenomena. Donna L. Franklin demonstrates that births to black and white unmarried mothers had been increasing, thus challenging the concept that throughout American history, most families consisted of a breadwinner-husband and a homemaker-wife.[313] Thorough historical investigation has corrected such myths and few subjects have been as detrimentally susceptible to fairy tale treatment as the family, contributing to improbable expectations about family life and condemnation of families that deviate from the dominant norms.

Bunny Sheffield and Powther are both in a similar situation regarding their wives, therefore colour and class is of no consequence. However, Petry encourages our readerly sympathy toward Powther; despite his failings we understand his behaviour far more than the rather two-dimensional and impassive Bunny who was 'a tame cat…too nice, too gentle' (200). Similarly, Camilo's infidelity appears less a deviation from prevailing marital standards because we have a more intense textual connection with Link. As Dingledine suggests, this response stems from 'the power of Petry's empathetic, humane naturalism'.[314] Furthermore, as Petry said herself, 'truth' and 'actual events of your own life…have to be worked into and a part of the whole…They have to be mixed in'.[315]

Abbie and Frances K. Jackson form a positive partnership that has stood a socio-culturally gendered test of time. Both women are financially independent and

[313] Donna L. Franklin, 'World War II and its Aftermath', in *Ensuring Inequality: The Structural Transformation of the African-American Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 99-115.
[314] Dingledine, '"It could have been any Street"', 98-99.
[315] Wilson, 'Ann Petry. The New England Connection', 76.

successfully survive through their own continuing economic means. Abbie has a reasonable standard of living from renting out the upper section of her house and unmarried Frances runs her own funeral business. Textually they do not play a significant role in the American Dream regarding acquisitive gain, however, despite such 1950s mass consumption being vilified 'for its crass materialism' according to Schudson, individuals such as Abbie and Frances represent 'aspirations achieved and goals hard won'.[316] Schudson continues to argue that 'the actual American Dream…is very much about living in reality'; however, its 'liberality of nature and of people' is offset by 'a deep illiberalism…sometimes racism'.[317] This is most apparent in the fact that Abbie's and Frances's 'success' is limited to The Narrows; they are certainly not neighbours of Lola Bullock. Despite such limitations, these two women epitomise the 'black woman' catapulted

> from the confines of a patriarchal, dehumanizing America to another country, where they can operate businesses, keep a roof over their heads, and move beyond restrictive and male-dominated literary configurations.[318]

Petry succeeds in challenging and transforming preconceived notions of 1950s black womanhood and manhood, offering a more 'realistic version of the American Dream' by depicting characters who duly fail.[319] Success can come at a cost and for Abbie and Frances it will be the loss of Link whose mythical black masculinity will act as a determining factor in his demise.

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[316] Schudson, 'American Dreams', 570.
[317] Schudson, ibid., 572.
[318] Clark, 'A Distaff Dream Deferred? Ann Petry and the Art of Subversion', 504.
[319] Dingledine, '"It could have been any Street"', 95.

Black Masculinity, Echoes of Slavery

Petry portrays the adult Link as influenced by his childhood and by his ethnic cultural history. As a black mother, Abbie always reminded Link of his blackness and hence his racial responsibility, whereas Hod removed the weight of colour consciousness, accordingly emancipating and allowing Link's *male* self-esteem. As Nellie McKay indicates, Hod and his cook Weak Knees both 'teach Link about his black heritage, offering a perspective different from Aunt Abbie's'.[320] McKay proposes that this diverse parenting also suggests an interesting critique of 'nontraditional versus traditional child-rearing practices'.[321] Despite their conflicts, Hod and Abbie actually help to facilitate a positive education for Link who, unlike Wright's Bigger Thomas, is not a peripheral member of his community. Petry counters what is considered a 'naturalistic' formula. Instead, Petry employs characters such as Abbie to retrospectively consider how past experiences unpredictably facilitate and formulate who we eventually become and thus how we lead our lives. In this sense, history and stereotypes can be considered in the same way, how they contain the power to manipulate an individual. As Petry states, 'The past. The answer [is] in the past' (246).

Both personal past and historical notions of black men's relations with white women suddenly become intermingled with contemporaneous issues of interracial relationships and mythical images, especially the sexual image of the black male that has been 'exaggerated to produce a very stereotypical notion of his sexuality'.[322] So, when

[320] McKay, Introduction to *The Narrows*, xii.
[321] McKay, ibid.
[322] Martin S. Weinberg and Colin J. Williams, 'Black Sexuality: A Test of Two Theories', *The Journal of Sex Research*, 25 (1988), 197-218 (199).

Abbie finds Camilo in Link's room and unceremoniously throws her out of the house, Petry illustrates Link as being victimised in multiple ways. Past and present intermingle with negative snapshots of Abbie, Camilo and Hod making a surreal section of narrative. During a recent argument, Camilo called him a 'black bastard' (257) and further back in Link's past, Bill Hod whipped him for sneaking to China's place (258). These memories float in and out of Link's consciousness. The historical implications of these separate incidences are unavoidable as we see Link emotionally, racially and physically abused and punished for no externally apparent reason other than the individual fury of the perpetrators. Petry emphasises these issues by textually representing these events through stunted staccato sentences that connect the multifarious people in his life, and pull together his past and present: 'Abbie: Out of my house. Camilo: Black bastard. Bill Hod: I'll cripple you for life. And Mamie Powther? Sure…China? Sure…Executioners, all' (260). Petry significantly and continually confuses all racial expectations and representations. She presents the reader with multifaceted characters in a novel that for its time is 'contemporary in the intricacies of its literary, philosophical, and social implications'.[323]

Petry's complex characterisation utilises and ruptures stereotypes, Bill Hod's persona particularly involving several 'types'. This ranges from the patriarchal instructor of life to the over-sexed and 'wily, dangerous' savage.[324] Hod has violent tendencies, as Link would testify, and the relationship with Mamie and China proves his overt sexuality, but one directed toward black, not white, women. Stuart Hall writes that the representation of 'hypermasculinity has a long history, shaped by a pathologizing of

[323] McKay, Introduction to *The Narrows*, xvii.
[324] Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1997), 263.

blackness, and has been the site historically of pronounced fantasies about black men's sexuality and physical prowess'.[325] Petry further confounds this 'white' construct by making Link a romantic character, not an aggressive individual. It could be argued that his dangerousness is perceived through his relationship with Camilo and what this forces a white and black community to consider. Thus, Petry enables the reader to reflect upon the associations involving 'cultural representations of black masculinity, the importance of those representations in the production and maintenance of white male power and privilege, and the real institutional practices that marginalize men of African descent'.[326] Through Link, Hod and Powther the reader has access to how stereotyping, white attitudes and economics have helped to forge the differing notions of masculinity in the novel and how these will affect Link in particular.

Hall argues that the representation of the black man works on two different levels: 'a conscious and an overt level, and an unconscious or suppressed level'.[327] He proposes that white society has infantilised the black male and that this merely camouflages a deeper concern, that 'Blacks are really super-men, better endowed than whites, and sexually insatiable'.[328] As Petry demonstrates through Link, the African American man is caught within the '*binary structure* of the stereotype' being both '"childlike" *and* "oversexed"'; thus Hall continues, 'just as black youth are "Sambo simpletons"', as demonstrated by Link's school play, they are also brutish barbarians 'and/or…Uncle Toms'.[329] Petry proves the pointlessness of such narrow categorisations by consistently

[325] Hall, ibid., 305.
[326] Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 13.
[327] Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 263.
[328] Hall, ibid.
[329] Hall, ibid.

challenging their validity through what Emily Bernard describes as a depiction of 'multiple and competing historical conditions, cultural imperatives, and professional ambitions'.[330]

Hod's cultural and racially motivated imperative is to make Link aware of Camilo's hypocrisy, showing Link a year old newspaper that contains a feature section on Camilo as an exemplar of 'credit-to-the-country kind of millionaires, no scandals, no divorces' (270). Link wonders whether Camilo was 'out hunting for a new muscle boy' (271) which duly makes him feel as though Camilo idly contemplated an affair *because* of his colour. Here, Petry employs historical images with all the sexual insinuations that being black and masculine suggests: 'sold to the lady for one thousand dollars. Plantation buck. Stud' (280). Camilo's suspected financial transactions and expensive gifts run parallel to Link's dreams of love, marriage and children, and thus Link's 'distaste for everything, the girl, the car, The Hotel, everything, himself included' (281) has stemmed not only from his educated knowledge of slave history, but also from the general racial power struggle that he, as a black man, has experienced.

Petry positions Link beyond the stereotype that claims that he will avenge himself for the harm she has caused: 'Rape her? He couldn't' (284). However, Camilo has forced Link to re-locate himself within the stereotype of 'big black men' (288). Link questions Camilo as to why she has stayed with Bunny, sardonically remarking that it was in order to sexually compare a white man with a black man, '– for Kinsey' (290). Considering the

[330] Bernard, '"Raceless" Writing and Difference: Ann Petry's *Country Place* and the African-American Literary Canon', 88.

contemporaneous nature of the Kinsey Report and Link's comment[331], it is interesting to note that only young white adults provided the data.[332] Link would not have been interviewed which further emphasises his sexual 'otherness'. Link feels enmeshed within current cultural stereotypes and the historical myth that surfaced during the slavery era:

> For a black man who was enslaved, everything…was stripped from his being until all he had left that was potent and powerful was his physical, sexual self… The act of sex assisted the enslaved man in maintaining his masculinity and gave the freedom to prove his power while in bondage to the white man. [333]

Initially, Link naïvely believed that he was at liberty to love Camilo, but economics became the barrier rather than colour. On a personal level, their relationship negated the stereotyping of black men used by white male slave owners as a 'tactic to keep white women from sleeping with the black slaves'.[334] However, wider cultural attitudes toward black men historically echo white slave masters' negative comments that 'served to reinforce the black man's image…as he listened in silence, unable to respond'.[335]

Link's masculinity has been dented in several ways. Not only does he feel sexually exploited, but he also has to suffer the indignity of Camilo having the ability to pay for and retain those in her service; the bellboys, restaurateurs and parking attendants. However, Camilo cannot conceal her true self indefinitely; the duality of her existence can only lead to problems. As visions of Bill, Mamie, Powther, Camilo and Link collide, what remains is a sense that the self-perpetuating universal themes of pain, lust, loss, and

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[331] Alfred C. Kinsey, et. al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), and Alfred C. Kinsey, et. al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998).
[332] Weinberg and Williams, 'Black Sexuality: A Test of Two Theories', 202.
[333] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 18-19.
[334] Smith, ibid.
[335] Smith, ibid., 19.

love are eternal and do not racially discriminate. Camilo genuinely loves Link, his reaction to her deceit is completely understandable, and yet he fails to believe and acknowledge that her emotions are authentic. Link may feel like a 'MECHANICAL TOY', yet he is quick to locate Camilo in a generalised category of 'the filthy rich, the rich who had pale yellow hair and wore mink coats and cheated at cards' (291). Socio-cultural and gendered presumptions weigh heavily on Camilo, although negative racial expectations leveled at Link by far exceed Camilo's problems.

The Last Chance – Black Communal Attitudes

In The Last Chance, Mamie turns to see 'a white girl in a mink coat…the one that Crunch pushed down the front steps, and she felt laughter well up inside her, all over again' (300). Despite Camilo's obvious agitation, Mamie has little sympathy, for after all 'why should a white girl have Link Williams?' (300). Mamie's reaction raises further interracial issues detailed by William H. Turner:

> Black men dating/married to white women are perceived by other members of society (especially other Blacks) as doing 'it' at the expense of some other potential mate - his own Black woman…white women who engage themselves with Black men are either constitutionally deficient, morally permissive, or simply sexual freaks acting as though the 'myth' of Black male sexuality were real.[336]

Moreover, Turner continues, the 'Black man who mingles with white women, *prima facie*, implies his vote of "no confidence"' and non-participation in the plight of black

[336]William H. Turner, 'Black Man/White Woman: A Philosophical View', in *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*, 503.

people. Summarily, as black poet Don L. Lee puts it: 'You can't talk Black and sleep white'.[337] For Link, no matter how clandestine his relationship with Camilo had initially been, he was always caught in the same fundamental colour contradiction.

A potential female solidarity surfaces when Mamie realises that Camilo's feelings for Link are genuine, especially as Camilo reminds Mamie of a three year interracial relationship she had with a white man (301). However, Mamie's subsequent inaction is in addition to the comment made by the barman that black and white relationships should be 'in some other country' (304). This, as Turner suggests, sequentially leads to the complementary assumption that labels Camilo a 'white bitch' and a 'brokedown whore' (305). When Camilo finally finds Link, all that echoes in his mind are her words: black bastard. The general response in the bar reflects a general cultural non-recognition of a black man with a white woman, the situation being defined socially and racially. As Turner argues, subsequent to centuries of white womanhood being positively nurtured and that of the black man having been denigrated, the reaction itself has transcended the concept of mere social definitions; he advocates that a dialectic has evolved, and in such a dialectic, interracial relationships become fundamental *biological* contradictions rather than manifestations of a social incongruity. At the core of that dialectic is Anglo-American ideology and its philosophical system which regards all things as static and eternally remote from one another.[338]

Historically, the black community has been broadly defined in purely racial terms and artificially made into a separate grouping, as *The Narrows* illustrates. However, nowhere 'else in the world does a single race encompass people whose skin color ranges

[337] Turner, ibid.
[338] Turner, ibid.

from white to black…and whose facial features reflect the broadest possible diversity'.[339] This is not a static and eternally remote community; however, the vestiges of racism are such that Link's and Camilo's attempt to reverse an ideology in which they remain socially, physically and biologically separate, can never succeed. The nature of such instinctive attitudes and enduring principles is evident during Link's and Camilo's conversation; in fact they are inescapable. When Link comments that he felt 'one of a collection', he historically evaluates how:

> Back in the eighteenth century I would have been a silver-collar boy…ladies of the court collected monkeys and peacocks and little blackamoors as pets. Slender young dark brown boys done up in silk with turbans…and silver collars around their necks…the name of the lady…engraved on the silver collar. (315)

Camilo argues otherwise: 'It wasn't like that'; Link responds with 'Wasn't it? Isn't it?' emphasising her historical, political and racial ignorance as well as Link's inability to challenge assumptions regarding black maleness. Link should be attempting to forge new and positive male images; however, one individual has little chance against the social power of a white majority rule. Ironically, by loving Camilo, Link unconsciously reflects a social affirmation of her colour thus opposing values held by many of his own ethnic group. Franz Fanon echoes Link's irreparable situation when he wrote, 'to caress white breasts is to hold white civilization in the palms of (black) hands'.[340] Therefore, for Link to court or marry Camilo becomes, for black men, a refutation and contradiction of the black race and of any future radical value system.

The end of the relationship leads to Camilo's unexpected accusation of rape. Link is

[339] Russell, et. al., 'Black Identity', in *The Color Complex*, 80.
[340] Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 166.

now caught in one of many self-perpetuating myths allotted to black men, 'A white lady says I tried to rape her', he tells Bill during his phone-call (321). Gerder Lerner wrote that the 'myth of the black rapist of white women is the twin of the myth of the bad black woman – both designed to apologize for and facilitate the continued exploitation of black men and women'.[341] Originating from the historical stereotype of the aggressive black male, Angela Davis explains that the use of rape was a 'white-supremacist…routine arm of repression'.[342] For Link, what remains are confused thoughts and a system of beliefs that have become twisted and torn; Petry is not just playing with a chain of cultural signifiers, but rendering them asunder. A downward spiral of barely disguised racial hate will ensue as Link considers what could have been.

Camilo's accusation appears in the *Monmouth Chronicle* and the white response is surprisingly unsupportive: 'what was she doin' on the dock in Niggertown, at three o'clock in the mornin'? Just like she was askin' to be raped by a nigger' (337) are the dually gendered and racist reactions. Powther realises that he has forgotten how other people consider colour, the Treadway chauffeur especially epitomising a white American manhood that has been grounded upon the exclusion of others, in particular, blacks and women, Powther initially dubbing him 'the Nazi' (162). This character is representative of 'a postwar political climate of patriotic fervour'[343] and paranoia as discussed in *Zami*, an era of McCarthyism and uncertainty. Donna L. Franklin considers how this exclusion of blacks and women is associated with sociocultural changes that affected men's working lives, work being one of the main anchors of male identity. The wartime boom

[341] Gerder Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 193.
[342] Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 183.
[343] Franklin, 'World War II and its Aftermath', in *Ensuring Inequality*, 115.

had provided both blacks and women in general, significant gains in the employment market; however, by the late 1940s, this had been erased.[344] Furthermore, for the chauffeur, the position of women as socially and economically dominant in the workplace threatens his traditional sense of masculinity.

The conversation resorts to a disconcerting examination of white male attitudes toward white women who transgress from the social norm of good female behaviour, one that demands one does not 'debase' oneself sexually.[345] Therefore, the only interpretation the servants can accept is that she, despite her wealth, must be 'a whore' (340). This becomes a repeated motif, 'nigger', 'rape' and 'whore' becoming synonymous in their white male minds (341). Angela Davis examines the history of the 'myth of the Black rapist' and argues that 'the central role played by the fictional Black rapist in the shaping of post-slavery racism…implies the mythical whore'.[346] However, Davis means that *black* women become subsumed within this accusatory atmosphere, that they are labelled whores. In this historical discussion, the role of white women is relatively overlooked. The reality is that Link's and Camilo's interracial love and desire would not be socially acceptable in any era and thus the denigration of their individual reputations appears to be the only recourse. Powther eventually uncovers the truth of their relationship and hence the false accusation of rape. He is appalled at how Link makes such racially and economically 'separate worlds coalesce'; in actuality, colour, myth and truth, fairy tales and 'human flesh', fatally collide (345). The news spreads through the Treadway house, factory and the wider community, and interestingly, it is Camilo's actions that are questioned, because it was Link, not Camilo who was in his 'correct' black location.

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[344] Franklin, ibid.
[345] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 2.
[346] Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, 191.

Media (Mis)Representation

Words may have an element of authority in diminishing a person's reputation; however, the true power must lie in that of the photographic image. The media has absolute control as to how that representation is depicted and Peter Bullock, whose newspaper was formerly an abolitionist paper, will be instrumental in how Camilo and Link are portrayed. Mrs Treadway threatens to remove her advertising from Bullock's paper if he were to print Camilo's 'unfortunate accident' of drunkenly knocking down a black child (356), 'So he personally pulled the story' (358). Bullock's guilt is interrupted by Jubine who has an important picture to show him; however, Bullock tells him to go away. The next day, a photograph of the accident is on the front page of a New York tabloid. As Vernon E. Lattin discusses, Jubine refuses to 'turn away from the truth his camera reveals; he refuses to be bought and sold, to let illusion blur his lens'.[347] However, Jubine is certainly happy to sell his version of the 'truth', and after all, his is literally just one perspective of the situation. The newspaper in question appears particularly class conscious in its treatment of the story. Camilo, in her 'golden coach', 'the Duchess of Moneyland…drunk on her wealthy lifestyle…knocks down an innocent poor black child (362). The image encapsulates Camilo in the mythical realm of fairy tale but now her life is being dragged through the mire of media reality. The implied suggestion is that Jubine constructed the photographic image in order to make it more sensational, that the representation of Camilo does not illuminate the broader narrative.

Stuart Hall proposes that the meaning of events depends upon how they are represented; therefore, whoever dictates the process of representation governs the

[347] Lattin, 'Ann Petry and the American Dream', 72.

meaning, for instance, Jubine or Peter Bullock.[348] In this sense, representation signifies the *creation* of aspects of 'reality' such as people, locations, objects, occurrences, cultural identities and other nonfigurative concepts. Jubine is known to patiently wait for an event to happen, get what 'he wanted, and then' click 'his shutter' (365). Therefore, an intoxicated wealthy, young white woman is unlikely to obtain the sympathy of either black *or* white working-class readers to whom the tabloid is aimed. Ironically, a photograph that is juxtaposed with that of Camilo portrays Link in all his black glory and ensures 'every woman would…drool over it. Every white man…would do a slow burn' (365). Bullock racially anticipates the negative affects this will have on the Treadway reputation; 'Jubine had…made the Treadway girl look like a whore and made the nigger look like Apollo it was planned, deliberate' (365). Petry plays with modes of representation duly challenging the reader to consider their response to the given situation. In 'The Novel as Social Criticism', Petry wondered whether there was

> a streak of masochism in all of us; or perhaps we all feel guilty because of the shortcomings of society and our sense of guilt is partially assuaged when we are accused in the…pages of a novel, of having done those things that we ought not to have done – and of having left undone…things we ought to have done.[349]

Bullock will be forced to run a series of articles highlighting the black community and crimes 'committed by Negroes' (372), thus taking the onus and emphasis away from the Treadways. With enough 'spotlighting' and 'underlining', the image of a black Apollo will be reduced to that of The Criminal, and accordingly, Camilo's drunken features will

[348] Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 262.
[349] Ann Petry, 'The Novel as Social Criticism', in *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*, ed., Patricia Liggins Hill (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 1116.

be miraculously transformed into that of The Victim (372). Thus, Mrs. Treadway's public image, her wealth and power exemplify what Lattin describes as 'the illusion of the American ideal that supports the materialism that supports the racism'.[350]

A front page story containing an image of a black convict that would not normally be given prominence accordingly illustrates Bullock's media authority and desperate effort to re-present and control 'reality'. In this vein, Stuart Hall argues that the hypothesis of hegemony and 'negotiation' allow us to:

> rethink the real and representation in a way which avoids the model of a fixed reality or fixed sets of codes for representing it…to conceptualize the production of definitions and identities by the media industries in a way that acknowledges both the unequal power relations involved in the struggle and at the same time the space for negotiation and resistance from subordinated groups.[351]

Petry makes the reader aware of the multiple significance of the fixed reality of Bullock's represented 'crime'. It may appear to simply highlight the social and racial divide by playing on white presuppositions; however, Petry narratively juxtaposes a debilitating image of black masculinity with that of Link as Apollo, thus creating a space for racial re-negotiation within the mind of the potential white reader. Bullock's production and construction of negative black images may be fixed in print; however, the positive reality of Link is also indelibly portrayed.

Historical issues of black bucks and innocent white womanhood become resurrected as media representations feed into the realm of social myth. Cultural myths, such as a latent fear of black male sexuality, illustrate and reveal the suspicions, fantasies and desires of those who create them. The myths endure because they allow and resolve

[350] Lattin, 'Ann Petry and the American Dream', 71.
[351] Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 348.

social contradictions and conflicts that otherwise would remain troublesome. Thus Link's and Camilo's relationship must be re-presented as that of white female victim being overpowered by black brutality and lust, because the truth of their interracial love is inconceivable. According to Hall, the media is the arena where such racial ideologies are both produced and transformed, producing 'representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work'.[352] In her 1950 essay Petry argued that when 'society is given the role of fate, made the evil in the age-old battle between good and evil, the burden of responsibility is shifted away from the characters' and onto the readers.[353] Thus positive and negative representations of society are ultimately ours to translate. The reader must be aware that media images are just two-dimensional depictions and not true multi-faceted representations of the social world. In this way, Petry is most effective in employing everyday phenomena such as newspaper reports, advertisements and shop window displays in her narrative so as to challenge and question the reader's response to such subliminal messaging when it often uses a latent use of detrimental representations of race, class and gender.

Powther, however, desires to affiliate himself with those who produce and maintain racial ideologies by pointing the finger of blame at Link. This novel, however, does not enable the reader to affix the blame easily, for Powther's reason is to demonstrate that 'Negroes are not criminal, some of them are good' (386). Barry suggests that because all 'humans in Petry's world are prone to imperfection' not one individual has full

[352] Stuart Hall, 'The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media', in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: a Text-Reader*, eds., Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 19-20.
[353] Petry, 'The Novel as Social Criticism', in *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition*, 1117.

responsibility for Link's death.[354] However, in the Treadway car, Link finds himself ensconced between two white men, quickly appreciating that this is 'some…dark midnight deed' (390). Photographic images of Camilo and of Bullock's black convict swirl through his consciousness as Link partially censures the power of media representation, but apportions the bulk of the blame to 'that Dutch man of warre that landed in Jamestown in 1619' (399). The purpose of this historical fact is in order to emphasise the commencement of the demarcation of colour and gender, as 1619 denotes when 'the first White women disembarked at Jamestown, and in that same year the first shipment of Africans arrived, too'.[355] Thus Link does not 'blame' one individual and Petry succeeds in re-focusing the reader's attention toward a history of white oppression.

Subjugation and domination intermingle as Link is unceremoniously taken into a small sitting room in Treadway Hall; the main danger being Mrs. Treadway herself, not the three men. The tremor running through her body is 'Not fear but hate' (399-400). When Link does speak, the mere resonance of his well-educated voice shocks, he does not sound like 'AmosAndySambo' as they expect (401). However, Link now realises the seriousness of the situation and how the interracial consequences of his relationship with Camilo means he will never 'get out of this room alive'; after all, in pure Shakespearian style, the 'old black ram has been tupping her white ewe' (401). Link's racial offence can be neither forgotten nor forgiven, just as Othello initially offended the white sensibilities of Venice and Desdemona's father.[356] In this scene and within the nature of the several white characters, 'moralisms do not live and let live, they insist, hector, demand, cajole,

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[354] Barry, '"Same Train be Back Tomorrer": Ann Petry's *The Narrows* and the Repetition of History', 150.
[355] Russell, et. al., 'Masters, Slaves, and Lovers', in *The Color Complex*, 9.
[356] Reference to 'Othello', "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe". *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, eds., W. G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright, 2 vols (New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1980), I. 1. 88.

arm-twist, or, of course, much worse'.[357] They desire a confession that would state that Link *did* rape Camilo. Link refuses and watches in disbelief as Mrs. Treadway reaches for a gun, then 'heard the explosion…"we were in love"…He tried to laugh, and pitched forward onto the floor' (406-7). In an interview with John O'Brien, Petry said she had trouble writing Link's death, after all, 'here was this man who in so many ways had to battle to survive; and he *had* survived…fairly whole as a person', but regarding Camilo, 'there was no way, logically, that he would not have been killed'.[358]

The murder committed by Mrs Treadway comes to light and with ultimate dramatic effect, the reader along with Abbie imagines Mrs. Treadway drive the 'carefullycaredfor oldfashioned car' unknowingly toward the river and the site of Link's and Camilo's first meeting, caught by a traffic policeman with Link's wrapped body on the back seat (413). After the funeral, Abbie contemplates the murder, the motives and the cause and considers how much Link was hated by the white family, surmising that 'we all had a hand in it, we all reacted violently to…Link and that Girl, because he was colored and she was white' (419). Barry's view is that *The Narrows* 'is grim', that 'the social commentary does not aspire to great change'.[359] However, I argue that Petry is not necessarily calling for 'great change' but rather she is asking for *individual* change through Abbie's solitary stand at the end of the novel against the aggressive, hating likes of Mrs Treadway *and* Bill Hod. In an interview with Mark Wilson, Petry mentions the 'tremendous influence'[360] that Henry Thoreau had upon her early reading and one must, in relation to Abbie, consider one of Thoreau's central arguments: 'the only obligation

[357] Schudson, 'American Dreams', 572.
[358] Wilson, 'Ann Petry. The New England Connection', 79.
[359] Barry, '"Same Train be Back Tomorrer": Ann Petry's *The Narrows* and the Repetition of History', 154.
[360] Wilson, 'Ann Petry. The New England Connection', 74.

which' one has 'a right to assume, is to do at any time what' one thinks is right.[361] Furthermore, Thoreau's *Walden* poignantly states that:

> The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation…a stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things.[362]

Abbie's former resignation has been racial in essence, her present quiet desperation stemming from both historical and personal foundations. Her awareness of her prejudices has, through Link's death, become a realisation that the wise thing to do is curtail potential desperate acts. So, Abbie, in true Thoreau tradition must do what she thinks is right and go to the police and 'tell them she believed the girl was in danger' (427). Thus Petry reverses readerly and cultural expectations that Abbie would understandably have desired revenge and stood back and allowed Hod to act accordingly. However, Abbie will insist that someone listen, her voice must be heard now Link's black voice has been silenced, therefore illustrating Petry's compelling visualisation of the complex dynamics of African American women's lives and survival techniques.

Abbie, at least, attempts to racially envisage more than just pale yellow hair and blue eyes and not merely see a stereotypical stock image, and in this sense offers hope that some of the wounds inflicted on the African American community may heal. The first step is personal awareness, so as to conceive that individual autonomy is a basic human right regardless of the colour of your skin. Petry employs and enmeshes historical

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[361] Henry David Thoreau, 'Resistance to Civil Government', in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature 1820-1865*, ed., Nina Baym (1849; New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2003), 1793.
[362] Henry David Thoreau, 'Walden, or Life in the Woods', in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature 1820-1865*, ed., Nina Baym (1854; New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2003), 1810.

elements of racial stereotyping and the 1950s American Dream ideal; she amalgamates multiple personal introspection and retrospection and media representation in a tale that concludes that individual race and class consciousness must transform and adapt. Bonnie TuSmith argues that Americans verbally isolated themselves from one another and 'have been creating ideological barriers for some time'.[363] Thus, through its interracial theme and cast of characters, *The Narrows* succeeds in engaging in a cross-cultural debate that while cultures may change and adapt regarding an individual group's social circumstances, there is still a sense of a lack of commonality among group members. Petry's narrative points out the pitfalls and states that this must not be the case.

[363] TuSmith, *All My Relatives: Community in Contemporary Ethnic American Literatures*, 18.

CHAPTER FOUR:

ALICE CHILDRESS (1920 – 1994)

Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White.

Interracial Relationships – Black women, White Men and Community.

Figure 6. The Statue of Liberty, New York. Herman and Julia's chosen destination for their marriage and home (*Wedding Band*, 32). Photograph taken by the author, 2007.

Introduction

Ann Petry's portrayal of an interracial love affair ends with the murder of the black male protagonist Link. Alice Childress depicts a long-term interracial relationship that sadly ends with the death of the white male character Herman. In this sense the two narratives differ immensely, with Petry's exploration being a very public affair and Childress's portrayal being much more personal. Petry's conclusion is that Link and Camilo were culturally doomed from the start, whereas Childress initially offers a semblance of a future for her two lovers, Julia Augustine and Herman. Nevertheless, both authors portray similar concepts of love and hate, varying degrees of colour, patriarchy, and bigotry. Originally penned in the early 1960s, the play was not printed or performed professionally until 1966, despite some interest in producing the play on Broadway. However, due to its alleged controversial subject matter, the play remained largely unknown to audiences. Childress, it appears, unfashionably portrayed a loving, enduring interracial relationship conflictingly juxtaposed with the fervent, civil rights atmosphere of the mid-1960s. Furthermore, with predominantly black *and* white male civil rights activists peacefully enforcing laws upholding desegregation in the South,[364] Childress demonstrates segregation's insidious nature purely through the perceptiveness of black women. In 1972, *Wedding Band* was finally produced in New York and subsequently a New York Shakespeare Festival production of the play[365], based on Childress's

[364] Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders – 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 209-304.
[365] Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., *Contemporary African American Novelists: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 91.

screenplay, was broadcast by ABC in 1974.[366] Such a conspicuous time lag from dramatic conception to performance demonstrates how more 'race' writing needed to appear before Childress's creative output could become palatable.

Exploring what Childress has self-labelled the 'anti-woman' laws that governed the 'South after Reconstruction, and still in force in the first decades of the twentieth century'[367], *Wedding Band* dramatises the relationship between a black woman named Julia Augustine and her white lover Herman. Julia and Herman have spent a decade attempting to conceal their relationship, Julia having to move each time they are discovered. In addition to this is the prejudice felt by both Julia's black community and Herman's white mother and sister. Ironically, Herman's socially aspiring working class mother has known bigotry aimed at her due to her Germanic heritage. As Childress herself wrote, women 'were legally isolated and restricted by the inhumane laws' that 'freed the fathers (black and white) of the children of black women from any responsibility…and disinherited black women and their children from property rights'.[368] Furthermore, both black and white women endured these laws, 'and, each suffered alone, since a woman's testimony about the paternity of her child was not considered valid'.[369] Unsurprisingly, the play has therefore been considered by E. Barnsley Brown as 'one of Childress's most serious and tragic plays'.[370] Throughout this love/hate tale, Childress introduces the audience to multifarious characters and invites a deconstruction of their

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[366] Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 29.
[367] Rosemary Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', *MELUS*, 7 (1980), 57-68, 58.
[368] Alice Childress, 'A Woman Playwright Speaks her Mind', *Freedomways*, 6 (1966), 14-19, 14-15.
[369] Childress, ibid., 18.
[370] La Vinia Delois Jennings, 'Segregated Sisterhood: Anger, Racism, and Feminism in Alice Childress's *Florence* and *Wedding Band*', in *Black Women Playwrights: Visions on the American Stage*, ed., C Marsh-Lockett (New York: Routledge, 1999), 142.

intertwining involvement with each other in the midst of the politics and prejudice of the time. Thus Childress's play acts as a protest regarding the refutation of women's rights and her intention was to create a 'vigorous political statement' against such issues.[371] Close textual analysis of this drama will clearly illustrate how inhumane anti-woman laws endorsed patriarchal norms that made life virtually intolerable for black and white women alike. The importance of Childress's inclusion in this thesis is to revitalise her play in order to utilise its historical merits and political relevance within the field of theatre. Furthermore, from a twenty-first-century black feminist perspective, to illustrate its potential with regard to maintaining and promoting a positive black female identity.

Childress's play examines the enduring nature of 'illegal' love between the characters Julia and Herman in South Carolina during the First World War[372]; Childress thus employs a retrospective dramatisation with the purpose of illustrating multifarious and contemporary racist attitudes, this historical response being critically important. *Wedding Band* confronts bigotry and intolerance, however, Childress reveals that prejudice is not only levelled *at* blacks, but is also displayed *by* blacks. It will be through Julia's budding black socio-historical awareness that Childress offers us an alternative perception for black female empowerment.

Childress's characters are the imperfect men and women of a real world. Rather than present audiences with a model for racial harmony, Childress exposes the reality of life for black and white Americans as she explores the frailty of humanity so entrenched in maintaining cultural conventions and ethnic boundaries. Along with another contemporary black female playwright, Adrienne Kennedy, Childress tackles the 'taboo

[371] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 58.
[372] Alice Childress, *Wedding Band: A Love/Hate Story in Black and White* (1966; New York: Samuel French Inc., 1973). Hereafter, page numbers cited in the text.

topic of miscegenation' and as E. Barnsley Brown suggests, 'represents the African American struggle against both external and internal oppression'.[373] Thus, this commanding drama of interracial desire signifies a distinct African American contribution to 'realism's contestation of the master narrative of American culture' as, through its depiction of seemingly mundane everyday occurrences, it discloses how fragile, imperfect, unrepresentative, or erroneous that narrative has been.[374]

Contemporary Reviews

With regard to contemporary reviews of *Wedding Band*, Clive Barnes of the *New York Times* wrote that 'Indeed its strength lies very much in the poignancy of its star-cross'd lovers, but whereas Shakespeare's lovers had a fighting chance, there is no way that Julia and Herman are going to beat the system. Niggers and crackers are more irreconcilable than any Montagues and Capulets'.[375] Richard Eder of the *New York Times* found that Childress's treatment of the themes and issues in *Trouble in Mind* and *Wedding Band* gave these plays a timeless quality, that 'Childress used the concentric circles of the play-within-the-play to examine the multiple roles blacks enact in order to survive…The question…is whether race is a category of humanity or a division of it…but it takes the freshness of new life in the marvellous characters that Miss Childress has created to ask

[373] E. Barnsley Brown, 'Passed Over: The Tragic Mulatta and (Dis)Integration of Identity in Adrienne Kennedy's Plays', *African American Review*, 35 (2001), 281-295 (281-282).
[374] William W. Demastes, ed., *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996), 8.
[375] Richard Eder, 'Stage: *Wedding Band* by Alice Childress', *New York Times*, 11 January (1979), 17. Also see *Dedria* Bryfonski, ed., 'Alice Childress', in *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, and Other Creative Writers* (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co., 1980), 104.

it'.[376] However, a considerable amount of the criticism on the drama disregards its feminist undertakings and concentrates on the fact that it predominantly depicts an interracial relationship in the segregated South. Although, according to Childress, what is most important about the drama is that it exposes the denial of women's rights by laws created by men to protect men and because of these 'anti-woman' laws, the play's female characters cannot fully live out their lives. Juxtaposed with this Childress portrays how Herman's white Germanic mother must jeopardise his life for fear of laws that would question a white man's presence in a black neighbourhood. Thus, both her black and white female characters become victims of a patriarchal system that shuns them because of race, because of class, and because of gender.

The strength and insight of Childress's characterisations have been widely acknowledged; contemporary critics contend that the characters that populate her plays and novels are believable and memorable. Eder praises the 'rich and lively characterization' of *Wedding Band*. Similarly impressed, Harold Clurman writes in *The Nation* that 'there is an honest pathos in the telling of this simple story, and some humorous and touching thumbnail sketches reveal knowledge and understanding of the people dealt with'.[377] Furthermore, Clurman states that the 'divisions and tensions that *Wedding Band* dramatizes still exist to a far more painful extent than most of us are willing to admit'.[378] However, Childress has tended to be anthologised as a writer and seldom written about, thus, critical acclaim, as shown in the reviews above, remains contemporary to her work. Whether Childress has fallen out of theatrical fashion in the

[376] Eder, ibid.
[377] Harold Clurman, 'Theater', *Nation*, 215 (1972), 475-476. Excerpted in *African American Women Playwrights: A Research Guide*, ed., Christy Gavin (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999), 40.
[378] Clurman, ibid.

twenty-first century can only be judged by the dearth of significant literary analysis. This chapter will demonstrate that the content of her work has been considered too empathetic and optimistic toward the socio-cultural integration of black and white, that critics have overlooked the play's subtle political message.

As the 1950s commenced, so did the developing civil rights movement. Political awareness grew and aims were to secure, through legal means, the enforcement of the guarantees of racial equality contained in the Civil War amendments to the US Constitution and by the Civil Rights Acts of the 1860s and 1870s.[379] In literary terms, the 1950s found black writers 'catapulted into a new role in a Western culture once morally depleted and challenged by ethnic and racial pluralism on a global scale'.[380] A conscious need to communicate racial issues that would promote such concerns without engendering further animosity arose. Black commentators and writers such as Alain Locke describes this mid-century period as being one in which a race of people had achieved a 'cultural maturity', located in a new relationship between the past and present. From the perspective of the 1950s, Locke considered the Harlem Renaissance as the youthful figure of the African American culture. The 1920s had given rise to a new self-awareness and self-expression that formed new opportunities and varying racial experiences. Female authors, playwrights and poets such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorraine Hansberry, Ann Petry, Pauli Murray, Paule Marshall and Alice Childress wrote during the 1950s, a time when even the upper middle-class clichéd image of the African American woman, common during the first half of the twentieth century, appeared silent

[379] Bruce P. Lenman, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of World History* (Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd., 2004), 179.
[380] Sigmund Ro, 'Coming of Age: The Modernity of Postwar Black American Writing', *The Black Columbiad: Defining Moments in African American Literature and Culture*, eds., Werner Sollors and Mana Diedrich (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 226.

and diminished.[381] For this reason, I intend to give voice to *Wedding Band*, a play that compellingly and compassionately reveals areas of miscegenation and women's rights that have tended to be historically neglected.

Wedding Band – 'Race' and Colour Consciousness

The play opens with details of time and place: '*Summer 1918…Saturday morning. A city by the sea…South Carolina, U.S.A.'* (5), the city being Charleston, Childress's birthplace. Three houses form the scene, the central one being 'gingerbready' in comparison to the other two weather-beaten facades (5). The description of the middle building exemplifies all the characteristics of the 'perfect' home with picket fence and window box, and yet symbolically it forms a confused and chaotic mélange of both contemporary and dated designs. 'Place' in this sense formulates a subtle and yet complex parallel setting to the ensuing events whereby shifting individual racial attitudes strikingly conflict with old cultural prejudices. Within this environment, Julia Augustine sleeps, only to be awakened by the crying of a little girl. The fact that Julia is motherless acts as a political mode of resistance, Childress's strategy echoing what Joyce Meier explains as the black slave woman's 'refusal to participate in and help perpetuate a system that treated their bodies and their children's bodies as property'.[382] However, the child's disturbance drags Julia from her bed and she enters a throng of black women outside who will encapsulate the 'anti-women' laws that Childress succinctly portrays. We meet Mattie and Lula, fellow

[381] Alain Locke, 'Self-Criticism: The Third Dimension in Culture', *Phylon*, 11 (1950), 391-394.
[382] Joyce Meier, 'The Refusal of Motherhood in African American Women's Theater', *MELUS*, 25 (2000), 117-139 (117).

neighbours and tenants, and Fanny, their landlady, who, like Petry's Abbie Crunch, believes she is the 'self-appointed…representative of her race' (6).

Mattie works hard and epitomises Southern blackness and recalls Abbie's derision of 'Colored people's houses [that] always smells of food, ham and fried chicken and greasy greens. Sometimes…they're all stomach and no mind' (Petry, 124). Mattie also exemplifies how menial jobs 'have been traditionally available to poor women of color'.[383] With regard to Mattie and Petry's character Mamie, Abbie considers them guilty of the black 'race's' continual participation and association amid white stereotyping, namely, that all black people tend to be automatically characterised as inferior and unworthy individuals. Abbie, and to a certain extent Fanny, can be considered as guilty of racial generalisations when we should consider 'race' as meaning diverse things at different times. To Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'race' is entirely a construct, with no reality other than its usage in discourse:

> 'Races', put simply, do not exist, and to claim that they do, for whatever misguided reason, is to stand on dangerous ground...For, if we believe that races exist as things…we cannot escape the danger of generalizing about observed differences between human beings.[384]

Through their characters, Petry and Childress disturb the established dual black-white formation of 'race' and draw attention to the frequently disregarded history of interracial relations 'that has characterized North American life'.[385] Both Abbie and Fanny are guilty of such generalised classification when they observe their fellow African

[383] Meier, ibid., 131.
[384] Henry Louis Gates Jr., ed., *'Race,' Writing, and Difference* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 402-3.
[385] Barnsley Brown, 'Passed Over: The Tragic Mulatta and (Dis)Integration of Identity in Adrienne Kennedy's Plays', 282.

Americans; similarly, white individuals suffer the same fate. To Gates, 'Afro-American history is full of examples of "racist" benevolence, paternalism, and sexual attraction'.[386] Such examples can be seen to a vast degree in *The Narrows* during the annual tea given by the 'benevolent' Mrs. Treadway for her black workers (Petry, 335/353). Consequently Gates identifies racism such as hers as existing when:

> one generalizes about the attributes of an individual (and treats him or her accordingly). Such generalizations are based upon a predetermined set of causes or effects thought to be shared by all members of a physically defined group who are also assumed to share certain 'metaphysical' characteristics... [this] can have rather little to do with aggression or contempt in intent, even if the effect is contemptible (but often 'well-intentioned').[387]

Along with Petry, Childress portrays the differing aspects of ethnicity and its complex facets, but more interestingly, not from a white perspective, but through the eyes of a communally involved black individual, Fanny. Childress demonstrates an awareness of multifarious gradations of domestic and working class attitudes within the black community with the dramatic inclusion of Julia, unquestioningly and immediately considered by Fanny as superior to her other black female tenants. Julia inhabits a liminal 'space between blackness and whiteness', and consequently lacks a unified conception of self that results from a sense of not belonging to any community.[388] Childress achieves this by making Julia different from the other working women, often being objectively described as an '*attractive brown woman*' (7). This designation of a specific colour is

[386] Barnsley Brown, ibid., 403.
[387] Barnsley Brown, ibid., 403-4.
[388] Barnsley Brown, ibid., 283.

relevant when one considers the importance of race with regard to influence and social advantage. For those with light-brown to mid-brown skin:

> color tone has not seemed a very important factor in their lives. It is primarily those who are either very dark or very light who are affected the most by the gap in power and privilege.[389]

Julia's speech is suitably proper and polite and is again positioned in contrast to characters such as Mattie. Fanny addresses her as 'Miss Julia', thus automatically establishing her as socially separate (7).

Childress writes during the civil rights era of the 1960s and yet dramatically depicts the early twentieth century and all the political issues this period grappled with regarding African American women. In literary terms, Barbara Christian details how 'Afro-American literature', from the late nineteenth century, had begun to 'move in a different direction'.[390] The literary figure of the 'Mammy' was intrinsic to Southern white writing, whereas black literature predominantly focused on the image of the 'Tragic Mulatta'.[391] During and after slavery, the mulatta was considered a privileged individual as opposed to the 'poorer, darker-skinned' member of the coloured community, and increasingly, skin tone, not just colour, came to represent a sub-hierarchy.[392] Interestingly, history and *Wedding Band* intertwine when one bears in mind that after American independence from England:

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[389] Kathy Russell, et. al., 'The Color Gap in Power and Privilege', in *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993),40.
[390] Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 3.
[391] Christian, ibid.
[392] Russell, et. al., 'Masters, Slaves, and Lovers', in *The Color Complex*, 16.

> Social distinctions within the Colored community were increasingly made on the basis of skin color…Mulattoes living free in Charleston, South Carolina…intermingled and intermarried only with each other, actively discriminating against those who were dark.[393]

Against the racial backdrop of this colour conscious hierarchy, Julia's skin colour attests to an illicit crossing between cultures. She may not be able to 'pass' for white as can the pale-skinned mulatta; however, as mentioned above, her lighter brown complexion means she is socio-politically less affected by 'the gap in power and privilege'. As much as the literary 'Tragic Mulatta' was alienated from both white and black cultures, she also represented a sense of powerlessness. This subjection and helplessness can also be politically transferred to women such as Julia, who, intimately involved as she is with a white man, endures not only the indignity of a socio-politically inscribed legal inferiority but also racial discrimination by a black and white social system that contentiously questions how dark is 'black' and how light is 'white'.

Legal Implications

It is not merely Julia who is entrapped within the snare of legalised discrimination; Mattie is forced to struggle financially, as the state will not accept her second marriage to October, the result being that she is not legally entitled to any governmental war benefits (18). A letter from October encapsulates a multitude of socio-cultural issues. Firstly, what becomes obvious is Mattie's illiteracy, as she has to ask Julia to read it (17). Secondly, Mattie and October embody the reality of poverty; however, the imagined economic

[393] Russell, ibid.

salvation of the Merchant Marines is soon negated by their 'marriage'. Thirdly, a lack of money means October cannot afford a photograph 'to say this is my wife and child' to the other men (17). Not only does October emotionally require a visual reminder of his family, a picture could also be considered physical proof of their existence, considering the state does not legally recognise Mattie as his spouse. According to Catherine Wiley, Mattie and Julia 'learn to depend on themselves and each other rather than on absent men, a self-reliance born painfully through self-acceptance'.[394] However, this statement denies that at the beginning of the play there is little black female solidarity; only at the end of the play does a suggestion of sisterhood emerge. In fact, this scene becomes emblematic of many working class black individuals' lives and illustrates Childress's desire for '"telling the truth" about their many experiences'.[395] For Childress, the importance was to visibly portray such realities, especially those of black women who endured an 'unrelenting struggle against racism and for human rights'.[396]

Julia and Herman's experience epitomises and amalgamates legal and racial issues of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth century whereby many American states passed anti-miscegenation laws, often based on ambiguous interpretations of the Bible, particularly the story of Phineas which served to fuel 'radical white racist identity'.[397]

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[394] Catherine Wiley, 'Whose Name, Whose Protection: Reading Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*', *Modern American Drama: The Female Canon*, ed. June Schlueter (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 184.

[395] Olga Dugan, 'Telling the Truth: Alice Childress as Theorist and Playwright', *The Journal of Negro History*, 81 (1996), 123-136 (128).

[396] Alice Childress, 'A Woman Playwright Speaks her Mind', *Freedomways* 6 (1966), 14-19, 16.

[397] The Phineas Priesthood is seen as a powerful combination of religious zealotry and racist ideology. They follow the example of Phineas, who killed an Israelite and his heathen wife. Phineas's zealous action saved the people of Israel from a plague and won this faithful servant and his descendants a perpetual priesthood. White supremacists view the Phineas story as an example of how to address interraciality. See, 'A Violent Priesthood', *Christian Century*, 8 September (1999) <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_24_116/ai_55881832/print> [accessed 2 February 2008]. Also, Jonneke Bekkenkamp, *Sanctified Aggression: Legacies of Biblical and Post Biblical Vocabularies* (London: T and T Clark International, 2003), 123.

Regarding interracial unions, 'militant white' racists 'committed acts of violent racial and moral purification out of righteous jealousy for 'God's Law';[398] the belief was to 'administer the judgment' as specified by God.[399] Accordingly, in a court of law, an interracial union was typically a criminal act, and laws prohibited the sanctifying of marriages between persons of different ethnic groups and prohibited the officiating at such ceremonies. It is made clear that Julia and Herman have been devoted to each other for ten years, and on this anniversary, Herman presents her with a wedding ring, ironically on a chain, in order to convey his commitment to their relationship. Had they attempted to marry, the legal implications of the time would have seen such individuals being found not guilty of miscegenation itself, but instead, having criminal charges of adultery or fornication brought against them. The media may have been guilty of continually fuelling cultural attitudes toward interracial unions; however, anti-miscegenation laws maintained such sentiments as seen in the U.S. Supreme Court 1883 case of Pace v. Alabama whereby Section 4184 of the Code of Alabama provides that:

> if any man and woman live together in adultery or fornication, each…must, on the first conviction of the offense, be fined not less than $100, and may also be imprisoned…or sentenced to hard labor…for not more than six months. On the second conviction…with the same person, the offender must be fined not less than $300, and may be imprisoned…or sentenced to hard labor for the county, for not more than 12 months…for a third…conviction [the offender] must be imprisoned…in the penitentiary or sentenced to hard labor…for two years.[400]

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[398] Bekkenkamp, ibid.
[399] Richard Kelly Hoskins, *Vigilantes of Christendom: The History of the Phineas Priesthood* (Lynchburg: Virginia Publishing Co., 1990), 213.
[400] Werner Sollors, *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature and Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.

(Figure 7. The image contains the words, 'I know you're not particular to a fault, /Though I'm not sure you'll never be sued for assault, /You're so fond of women that even a wench /Attracts your gross fancy despite her strong stench.'[401])

Herman is a self-employed baker, and not wealthy by any means, and thus such fines or prison sentences would financially ruin him, his business and his family. However, despite these legal and social pressures, Julia and Herman continue their personal relationship, demonstrating not only their love but also the absolute absurdity of the law.

Wedding Band traverses time and embodies the historical continuation of racial discrimination. Set in 1918, the play details the dangers of continuing with an interracial relationship. Ironically, as Childress created this drama, discrimination regarding couples such as Julia and Herman was still existent. In the 1965 case of Loving v. Virginia, trial court judge Leon Bazile sentenced to jail an interethnic couple[402], writing:

> Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, Malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix.[403]

This decision was eventually overturned two years later when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unanimously that marriage is 'a fundamental right of free men' and to deny this

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[401] 'Not Particular', Racist Mammy Postcard from Early 1900s, <http://racerelations.about.com/od/racerelationships/a/interracialcoup.htm> [accessed, 31/07/07].
[402] Peter Wallenstein, 'Interracial Marriage on Trial: Loving v. Virginia', in *Race on Trial: Law and Justice in American History* ed., Annette Gordon-Reed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 177-196.
[403] Wallenstein, ibid., 185-186.

right is a 'cruel and unusual punishment'.[404] Childress, by writing in the 1960s about an interracial couple in the 1910s, starkly demonstrates the significant continuation of systematic legal discrimination in America. Thus this play is committed to eradicating such inequalities through dramatic resistance and the eventual 'political awakening' and 'self-definition' of her characters.[405]

Racial classifications and the issue of personal liberty become particularly poignant with regard to Julia as a seemingly single black female, thus occupying an inferior political position in society. Her status is complex considering that, to the other women, she appears to be economically independent, and yet, to the 'poor white' travelling salesman, or The Bell Man, Julia's colour denotes sexual availability (13). In a mutually candid conversation, Julia confides in Lula, another neighbour, that she has 'a gentleman friend' but that they are not 'truly married' (12). The honesty of their tête-à-tête allows both women a brief moment of emotional liberation, until The Bell Man recognises Julia from another street; 'Move a lot, don'tcha?' he asks, illustrating Julia's lack of stability and security as the black partner of a white man in the South. In his sexual behaviour, The Bell Man presumes a certain male right over Julia's body, that because she has a white lover, she would automatically prostitute herself for any white man. Cultural echoes of the black woman as the white man's chattel are difficult to ignore, seen most succinctly in The Bell Man's genuine bewilderment at Julia's angry refusal. This scene indicates the indivisibility of racism and sexism, two contemporary issues for Childress that must be considered in juxtaposition with the historical period of the civil rights and women's movements within which she writes. As Lovalerie King suggests, plays of this

[404] Wallenstein, ibid., 185.
[405] Dugan, 'Telling the Truth: Alice Childress as Theorist and Playwright', 130

period have a recurring theme which is 'the need to relocate authority and to build strong identities, a necessary first step toward fulfilling the desire to be active subjects in the world'.[406] Julia must never fear her own voice, for 'the silence "hurts"'.[407]

'It's their country'

Negative social assumptions, colour contradictions and racially motivated cultural attitudes prevail on many levels in *Wedding Band* and are highlighted by all major and minor characters. The 'historical idiosyncrasy' regarding the spectrum of colour and working class is depicted,[408] from the poor white Bell Man, the self-employed and somewhat more financially secure Herman, to October and Nelson, Lula's adopted son, the only black male characters that both happen to be in the forces. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory describes this as a 'unique brand of theater in which many heritages come together, functioning side by side, to produce theater that is engaging, provocative, and diverse'.[409] Nelson has recently been provoked by white individuals throwing a pail of water at him because they believe he has 'no right to wear his uniform in public. The crackers don't like it. That's flauntin' yourself' (9). Such obvious racial tension dominates Nelson's leave with the white folk figuratively attempting to wash away his colour with his uniform. For them he has no socio-cultural position amid a predominantly white armed force, however, Childress has dramatically placed her two black characters

[406] Lovalerie King, 'The Desire/Authority Nexus in Contemporary African American Women's Drama', in *Black Women Playwrights: Visions on the American Stage* ed., Carol P. Marsh-Lockett (New York: Routledge, 1999), 128.
[407] Jennings, 'Segregated Sisterhood: Anger, Racism, and Feminism in Alice Childress's *Florence* and *Wedding Band*', 52.
[408] Wiley, 'Whose Name, Whose Protection: Reading Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*', 188.
[409] Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*, 81.

in the services, rather than Herman or The Bell Man. Regardless of their reasons for entering the forces, both October and Nelson are attempting in some way to defend the United States of America and yet racial hatred is such that they still remain culturally excluded and alienated. The racial divide is such that the genuine belief held by Lula is that 'It's their country and their uniform, so just stay out of the way' (11). However, for a young man such as Nelson, to 'just stay out of the way' is to acquiesce to 'white-folks'' attitudes and concur with stereotypical assumptions that all he is worthy of is working in a 'coal-yard' for the rest of his life (11). Thus Nelson acts as a challenge to the status quo, for the play's antagonist, according to Rosemary Curb, 'seems to be the whole system of government-sanctioned oppression', a conservative system 'fearful of change'.[410]

Nelson's refusal to quietly fade away and his determination to remain visible illustrate a changing black attitude and slowly growing sense of significance and worth. As Petry's character Link Williams is depicted as an educated and well-spoken Apollo in the 1950s, Nelson is similarly presented as a 'muscly fellow with a soft voice and a bittersweet sense of humor…dressed in civilian finery' (10). The implication of a burgeoning black male self-worth and social consciousness is adroitly portrayed through Nelson's actions and persona, and his image is positively represented. Conversely, even though October suffers the same negative racial epithets as Nelson, he relies far more on the stronger-willed Mattie who has a far more affirmative vision of blackness, 'tell 'em you my brown-skin Carolina daddy, that's who the hell you are' (19). In this sense, Childress dispels the myths of '"the contented slave"…"the exotic primitive"' and creates

[410] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 66.

more credible images of '"the black militant"…and "the contemporary black matriarch"'.[411]

The letter from October also highlights the importance of a husband's 'name' and 'protection', and is for Julia in particular, an issue that is difficult to contend with emotionally, considering that she has had to continually conceal her relationship with Herman. This emotional turmoil lends further emphasis to Julia's sense of displacement. Not only is she legally alienated from society because of her interracial relationship, Julia is also psychologically alienated from the other black women amongst whom she lives. Thus Childress disproves the common 'sisterhood myth' and what Jennings contends as a presumed 'solidarity rhetoric of shared and equal victimisation among all women'.[412] Furthermore, Jennings argues, Childress 'exposes a feminist issue in dire need of address and redress'.[413] By encompassing black and white women and men, Childress refuses the concept of an all-inclusive 'black experience', and instead, portrays multifarious selves and experiences as part of what E. Barnsley Brown describes as 'the universal human condition'.[414]

The truth of Julia's male 'friend' emerges, as she points out, 'you know it's against the law for black and white to get married…that's why I try to stay to myself' (20). This admission allows Julia to simultaneously vent her frustration and explain her detachment; for the other women this is an opportunity to vehemently voice their black female perspective on the white male: 'Everybody knows how that low-down slave master sent

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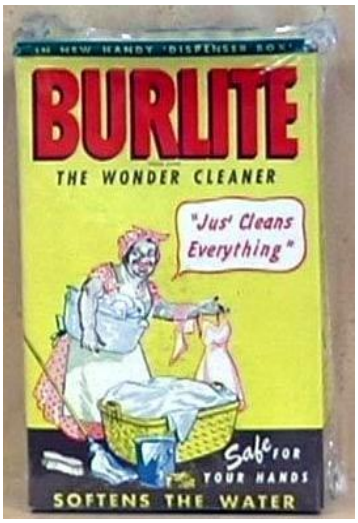
[411] Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, 'Black Women Playwrights: Exorcising Myths', *Phylon*, 48 (1987), 229-239 (229).
[412] Jennings, 'Segregated Sisterhood: Anger, Racism, and Feminism in Alice Childress's *Florence* and *Wedding Band*', 53.
[413] Jennings, ibid.
[414] E. Barnsley Brown, 'Celebrating the (Extra)Ordinary: Alice Childress's Representation of Black Selfhood', in *Black Women Playwrights: Visions on the American Stage* ed., Carol P. Marsh-Lockett (New York: Routledge, 1999), 133.

for a different black woman every night…for his pleasure. That's why none of us is the same color' (21). This statement echoes Childress's belief: 'Writers be wary of those who tell you to leave the past alone and confine yourselves to the present moment. Our story has not yet been told in any moment'.[415] Thus a purposeful historical reality of slavery becomes dramatically condensed within the history of one white master. These black women are allowed a textual space within which they are at liberty to display their own emotions juxtaposed with formulating a rather comic 'mean' white male caricature whose 'nose is pinched together so close' he 'can't get enough air' (21). Thus Childress endows Mattie and Lula with the power to reverse negative stereotyping. Contemporary images of early twentieth-century Mammy representations demonstrate that it has predominantly been the black female who has suffered the indignity of becoming a sanitised socio-cultural characterisation, her caricature being used to principally advertise household products; the African American female becomes as much an object as the items she supposedly promotes.[416] (Figures, 8, 9 and 10 below)



[415] Childress, 'The Negro Woman in American Literature', 16.
[416] 'Mammy Stereotypes', Jim Crow Museum at Ferris State University.

Unfortunately for Julia, Mattie's and Lula's fervent and fiery odium forces her to defend Herman and retreat back into her solitary status. Thus, the first scene of Act One ends with Mattie and Lula physically and emotionally abandoning Julia; they cannot understand why she has chosen to spend ten years of her life with a white man. The reality of this interracial relationship becomes not only a question of racial discrimination and segregation – that this is 'their country' – but also a subtle insight into cultural divisions within the black community itself. Julia effectively has no reputable position in either black or white society.

At the beginning of Act One scene Two, a tired Herman appears in front of the three houses, 'at a respectable distance' by Fanny (24). In an interview with Rosemary Curb, Childress explained how she decided that Herman would be an 'understanding, decent human being' who was not given a last name 'because Julia couldn't have it'.[417] In addition, Elizabeth Brown-Guillory details Childress's 'refusal to make script changes that would alter her intent', thus, an ordinary Herman remains as undeservingly victimised as Julia under a the law from which he cannot protect her.[418] This ultimately 'made it an unpopular topic' for a theatre production.[419] However, Herman's appearance demonstrates 'the tenderness and beauty as well as the ordinariness of Herman and Julia's love'.[420] The play uncompromisingly accomplishes such parallel moments wherein black and white converge. Herman tries to be polite; however, the women behave awkwardly. Curb argues that 'if an all-pervasive racism has conditioned the women to be suspicious of white cordiality, it has also toughened them with the stamina

[417] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 59.
[418] Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*, 32.
[419] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 59.
[420] Curb, ibid., 60.

necessary for survival'.[421] Such apprehension is illustrated through Mattie telling her white ward Princess that Herman is a 'light colored man' (24). Thus, racial excuses are made whereby Childress evokes an atmosphere of anxiety and colour contradiction, in which Herman is rendered a mulatto. Further related racial tension is relayed through Herman's story of how his house was recently daubed with "Krauts…Germans live here" because in the past his mother had boasted about 'her German grandfather' (25). Here, Childress chooses to show 'that prejudice is not solely a matter of colour, of black and white'.[422] E. Barnsley Brown suggests that such discrimination is a 'sharp reminder of the period in which the play is set'[423]; however, one must consider the implications of such prejudice throughout history and up to the present day.

Herman's Ebbing Life, Julia's Fading Dreams

Act One not only ended with the promise of a ticket for New York for Julia, it also succeeded in silently separating the collected individuals with regard to who was prepared to help Herman after he collapses on the porch. Nelson steps forward, because as a character he has already illustrated signs of civil action, of not accepting the culturally constructed role allotted to him. The socially aspirational Fanny demands Herman's removal; Lula and Mattie, somewhat unsurprisingly, emotionally and physically 'freeze' giving a dramatic effect of socio-cultural inertia (33). Thus, Julia's

[421] Curb, ibid.
[422] Barnsley Brown, 'Celebrating the (Extra)Ordinary: Alice Childress's Representation of Black Selfhood', 143.
[423] Barnsley Brown, ibid.

female neighbours are characterised as 'petty' in their 'defensive obsessions'.[424] Act Two duly begins with Julia, Fanny and Mattie discussing the next best move as they wait for Lula to return with Herman's sister. Fanny in particular gives a variety of reasons against a doctor being brought to the area:

> It's against the damn law for him to be layin' up in a black woman's bed… They'll say I run a bad house…We don't tell things to police…he might die on you. That's police. That's the work-house… Julia, it's hard to live under these mean white-folks…but I've done it. I'm the first and only colored they let buy land 'round here. (34-5)

Reputation and respect would have been in incredibly short supply in 1918 Charleston for a black woman, and Fanny believes that she has succeeded in 'representin' her race in-a approved manner' (35). However, despite aligning herself with 'her race', Fanny ironically warns Julia that she cannot, 'or any-a the rest-a these hard-luck, better-off-dead, triflin' niggers', ruin what she has socially achieved (35).

In *Wedding Band*, the community that Childress depicts lacks a cohesive female heritage, an African American history from which they could gain wisdom with which to contend and potentially transform their lives.[425] All the women live single lives; Mattie's husband is away, Fanny may 'bear the standard for the race', yet she sleeps alone, and the widowed Lula suffered at the hands of a womanising and violent husband (37). Such disjointed relationships are bound to struggle and falter when problems arise, and Julia's entrance into their world compels such fissures and fractures to open up accordingly. However, Childress's realism portrays black women telling their own stories, speaking

[424] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 60
[425] This comment is in relation to Audre Lorde's understanding of a female heritage such as in the island community of Carriacou. See chapter 1 and *Zami.*

their own truths; and thus, Sydné Mahone argues, this play becomes a site of 'resistance to oppression' and illustrates Childress's 'power in her exercise of artistic freedom' through 'the casting of her own image by her own hand'.[426]

Julia's difficulty throughout the play is less her interracial relationship than her reluctance to see herself as a member of the black community, and parallel to this is how her black neighbours perceive her as different. She assumes that her racial transgression with Herman will make her socially objectionable to the women with whom she wishes to disclose her secret, but her detachment from their routine existence also serves as a defence mechanism. However, her prospective salvation is situated within her ability to racially and personally develop as a black woman within the larger community. Brown-Guillory describes such a character as 'the evolving black woman',

> A phrase which embodies the multiplicity of emotions of ordinary black women for whom the act of living is sheer heroism. This creature emphasizes understanding and taking care of herself. Not always a powerhouse of strength, the evolving black woman is quite fragile. Her resiliency, though, makes her a positive image of black womanhood.[427]

In her 1977 essay 'Images of Black Women in Plays by Black Playwrights', Jeanne-Marie Miller argues that in plays penned by black men, black women's contentment or wholeness is determined by 'strong Black men. Thus, Black women playwrights bring to their works their vision, however different, of what Black women are or what they should be'.[428] Therefore, Nelson's comment, 'How can you account for carin' 'bout [Herman] a-tall?' (42) will not have any influence upon Julia. Julia's self-assertion is, in a greater

[426] Sydné Mahone, 'Seers on the Rim', *American Theatre*, 2 (1994), 22-4.
[427] Brown-Guillory, 'Black Women Playwrights: Exorcising Myths', 234.
[428] Brown-Guillory, ibid., 233.

social sense, a more precarious non-compliance with the white community. As Catherine Wiley explains, Julia wants her love affair to be one of personal devotion and sacrifice, but for Julia, the relationship falls short of such expectations. Furthermore, Wiley contends that Julia's sophistication in demeanour, schooling, and economic independence, 'are middle-class, traditionally white attributes' that 'make her and Herman available to each other. But theirs is, as the subtitle insists, a 'love/hate' story, in which interracial love cannot be divorced from centuries of racial hate'.[429] Issues of love/hate are introduced through Herman's family as his sister Annabelle patronisingly explains to Julia, 'I promised my mother I'd try and talk to you. Now – you look like one-a the nice coloreds…' (39). The tension is apparent between the two women and in this scene, Childress textually positions white next to black, locating them both in a similar class. Ironically, just as Fanny aspires to a different class, so Herman's mother, 'a "poor white"' who has 'risen above her poor farm background…tries to assume the airs of "quality"' (43). 'Miss Thelma' is treated deferentially by the black women and Fanny's acquiescence immediately promotes her to 'Friend Fanny' (44). Julia is officially repositioned on the periphery of this unfolding drama, an echo of Miller's argument that black women are 'peripheral in plays by whites'.[430] Both white female characters are racist, but as Rosemary Curb contends, Childress 'analyzes their motivations within the context of their own suffering'.[431] Furthermore, Julia is objectified and vilified by both Fanny and 'Miss Thelma' as they discuss an alibi and the burning of Herman's clothes and possessions. On the surface this would eradicate any remaining disease, however, on

[429] Wiley, 'Whose Name, Whose Protection: Reading Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*', 189.
[430] Brown-Guillory, 'Black Women Playwrights: Exorcising Myths', 233.
[431] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 63.

a more profound note, it would also erase evidence of Julia, thus morally purging and racially cleansing Herman's life of her being and colour.

In order for Julia to hear, Herman's mother reminisces as though 'Herman is dead' (47). She specifically evokes an image of a five year old Herman being physically forced to learn 'his John C. Calhoun speech':

> Oh, Calhoun knew 'bout niggers'. He said, '*MEN* are not born…equal, or any other kinda way…MEN are *made*…Yes, indeed, for recitin' that John C. Calhoun speech…Herman won first mention…at the Knights of The Gold Carnation picnic. (47)

Calhoun was 'a champion of the interests of the slave-holding states'[432]; and stated that slavery was 'in accordance with…the laws of God as revealed in nature'.[433] Thus, the mother's memory enmeshes historical and contemporary racial attitudes that position black people within a substandard and submissive socio-political space. Along with the father's link with the Ku Klux Klan, the mother's desperate need for upward social mobility denies her children any form of personal positive racial judgement. Ironically, Herman later meets Julia and even the adult Annabelle is pleased that her father changed his mind about the Klan; however, the mother can only remember the 'honour' bestowed upon her by the 'officers' (47). In this scene, Childress addresses the past and present in multiple ways and borrows the Shakespearian stratagem of 'the play within the play' in order to politicise, expose and deflate the perpetuating racist ideology.[434] Herman's mother's apparently innocuous recollection belies the appalling effects that the Klan's

[432] Una McGovern, ed., *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2003), 259.
[433] Clyde N. Wilson, ed., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun: 1845-1846* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 99.
[434] King, 'The Desire/Authority Nexus in Contemporary African American Women's Drama', 137.

white supremacist mind-set would have had upon a large black population. Additionally, Jennings suggests, 'as further amplification…Childress illustrates how white women in positions of power fail to make a difference…because of racial bias'.[435] Another crucial significance to Childress's chosen geographical location and historical position is the reformation of the Ku Klux Klan in 1915 by William J. Simmons who was influenced by Thomas Dixon's book, *The Clansman* (1905) and the film of the book, *Birth of a Nation* (1915). Preacher, novel and film 'romanticized the Klan and wanted a revival of this reconstructionist movement'.[436] Thus this dramatic inclusion forces a 1960s theatre audience to confront the continuation of such racist practices.

The issue of anti-woman and discriminatory laws continue to prevail as Herman's mother refuses to move her son until after dark. Meanwhile, Herman remains resolute about their relationship; however his mother would rather see him dead than be disgraced (48). As Herman slips in and out of a feverish consciousness, fragments of the Calhoun speech whipped into him seep out parallel to clipped instructions for Julia to go north. Childress, however, ultimately makes Julia determined to stay in Charleston, thus finally portraying her as 'a self reliant strong woman who embraces her blackness…a new image of black womanhood'.[437] However, Calhoun's words haunt this particular scene as Herman pronounces that it is a 'dangerous error to suppose that all people are equally entitled to liberty' (49). Here, nineteenth-century America meets twentieth-century America with a realisation that socially prescribed stereotypes and culturally constructed

[435] Jennings, 'Segregated Sisterhood: Anger, Racism, and Feminism in Alice Childress's *Florence* and *Wedding Band*', 45.
[436] Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American and Antisemitic Organizations: A History and Analysis* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1999), 54.
[437] Barnsley Brown, 'Celebrating the (Extra)Ordinary: Alice Childress's Representation of Black Selfhood', 145.

modes of behaviour pertaining to the African American community have not changed. Childress appears to be not only reminding her audience of the reality of racism, but also of the necessity to continue the fight against rampant discrimination and segregation. Childress thus exhibits, as Lovalerie King argues, 'an acute awareness of the need for the development of pride rooted in African American heritage'.[438] As if to prove this point, Julia suddenly finds a forceful voice and pointedly tells Herman's mother some uncomfortable truths. Julia realises that she is not responsible for changing the psyche of her oppressor, 'but for the management of her own…anger is as much a political matter as a biological one. The decision to get angry has powerful consequences'.[439] As Fanny steps in to aid the white woman, the argument descends into a verbal flinging of the worst racial epithets, 'Miss Thelma my ass! Her first name is Frieda…Black, sassy nigger…Kraut, knuckle-eater, red-neck…Nigger whore…sharecropper bitch' (50). Lorde explains that women 'responding to racism means women responding to anger; the anger of exclusion…of racial distortions'.[440] This could equally include Herman's mother in this instance; however, despite Julia's verbal outpouring, Herman's mother uses her ultimate political weapon: 'White reigns supreme…I'm white, you can't change that' (51). As the white woman has the last word, it is as though Childress is admonishing 'angry black women to take charge of their rage to empower themselves and others in their communities'.[441] As Lorde states, 'anger expressed and translated into action…is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification'.[442]

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[438] King, 'The Desire/Authority Nexus in Contemporary African American Women's Drama', 128.
[439] Jennings, 'Segregated Sisterhood: Anger, Racism, and Feminism in Alice Childress's *Florence* and *Wedding Band*', 45.
[440] Lorde, 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism', in *Sister Outsider*, 124.
[441] Jennings, 'Segregated Sisterhood: Anger, Racism, and Feminism in Alice Childress's *Florence* and *Wedding Band*', 53.
[442] Lorde, 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism', in *Sister Outsider*, 127.

The Curtain Falls

The final scene of *Wedding Band* amalgamates many of the previously highlighted anti-woman laws seen most poignantly in the opening section. This all occurs to the background sound of a marching band that will play during the parade sending black servicemen back to the war. Such a cacophony of sound reverberates and within this wall of noise is the complication of Julia and Mattie's lives. Ironically, Julia drunkenly echoes Herman's mother's sentiments: 'Live by the law…Obey the law!' (48) she says, when explaining to Mattie that just because she has been with October for eleven years does not make it a legal union (53). Further cultural complexities arise in the shape of The Bell Man who is faced by an increasingly empowered Nelson when the white man attempts to enter Lula's house. The Bell Man's only verbal recourse is to threaten Nelson that he may well 'end [his] days swingin' from a tree' (55) echoing Catherine Wiley's statement that, '*Wedding Band* describes an era when lynching presented one answer to demands for equality in the south'.[443] Furthermore, Curb argues that Childress's play acts as 'an authentic portrait of American racism in a rarely dramatized historical period with credible characters'.[444]

As though to alleviate the strained situation, the sound of the strutting 'Jenkin's Colored Orphan Band' allows an instant whereby the listening women can psychologically surmount and transcend their present predicaments (56). In an unexpectedly attempted Carolina folk dance 'passed on from some dimly-remembered African beginning', the women momentarily draw on a long forgotten heritage that

[443] Wiley, 'Whose Name, Whose Protection: Reading Alice Childress's *Wedding Band*', 187.
[444] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 67.

embraced concepts of community, sustenance and mutual respect (56). Audre Lorde in *Zami* specifically examines how the dearth of a positive matrilineal heritage can inhibit the potentially innovative formation of an affirmative African American female identity, that community *can* support and endow an individual with the requisite self-sustaining confidence in one's ethnicity.[445] In this sense, Childress's black female characters have the ability to 'function as catalysts for change'.[446] The powerful image of Lula and Julia dancing and laughing is in stark contrast to previous verbal aggression and white suppression, and when Julia arranges Lula's hair, the image of Audre Lorde's mother, Linda, braiding her daughter's hair, in a brief moment of emotional and spiritual connection, is difficult to overlook.

This particular point in time endows the normally submissive Lula with a certain sense of racial pride and self-knowledge: 'We got to show 'em we're good'; however, it still remains tinged with a traditional fearful realism, 'got to be three times as good, just to make it…'cause they'll kill us if we not' (56). Julia is in more defiant mood and relates a dream in which she desperately desires that the 'dead slaves – all the murdered black and bloody men' fight back against the white oppressor (57). This dream enables her to acknowledge a suppressed family history; her slave grandmother, her father's unpaid labor, her kinship with black women raising the food and making the clothes that helped build the south. She imagines the whole Carolina earth nourished with the heart's blood of her ancestors. As Brown-Guillory comments, Julia set out on a quest that has now culminated in 'emotional growth' and a sense of 'pride…magnifies her sense of family

[445] This observation concerns black female communal relationships and the positive power they possess. See chapter 1 and *Zami.*
[446] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 65.

solidarity'.[447] In the dream, symbolic slaves are called upon by Julia to rise up and be defiant, echoing Jennings's argument that 'rage' is necessary for black empowerment.[448] Nevertheless, Lula recounts a time when she begged a white court to keep Nelson from a chain gang, consciously resorting to stereotypical behaviour. Nelson's safety was paramount and Lula effectively achieved what she wanted; however, Lorde would argue that Lula's reaction was a form of 'guilt and defensiveness…bricks in a wall against which we all flounder; they serve none of our futures'.[449] As the two women discuss such a profound subject, they also check Lula's appearance. Rather than see this as inconsequential, we should consider that racism is so inherent that it exists parallel to seemingly everyday trivialities. Whether to contest or whether to comply with discrimination and oppression depends upon the situation in 1918, and Lula's choice illustrates the contradictory and inconsistent attitudes within the black community regarding their socio-political position in America throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[450]

As Nelson prepares to return to the army, Julia gives a rousing speech on the porch:

> You're comin' back in glory…with honors and shining medals…And those medals and that uniform is gonna open doors for you…and for October… Nelson, on account-a you we're gonna be able to go to the park. They're gonna take down the n—colored signs. (58)

[447] Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*, 83.
[448] Jennings, 'Segregated Sisterhood: Anger, Racism, and Feminism in Alice Childress's *Florence* and *Wedding Band*', 53.
[449] Lorde, 'The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism', in *Sister Outsider*, 124.
[450] See, Randal Maurice Jelks, *African Americans in the Furniture City – The Struggle for Civil Rights in Grand Rapids* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006). Also see, Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders – 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Conflicting feelings towards desegregation are voiced by Fanny, ('Some of us ain't ready for that'); and equally Nelson asks 'you believe all-a that?' (58-9). Such political rights may be much further in the future than Julia envisages, yet she does embody the necessary spirit that believes in the possibility. Childress holds up Julia as part of a diverse community, Margaret Wilkerson commenting that in this backyard 'there is pettiness, racial ugliness, jealousy, and exploitation…but there is also nobility, gentleness, pride, and love'.[451] Dramatically on cue, Herman appears in the yard, holding two boat tickets for New York, however they are paradoxically 'Colored tickets', meaning they could not travel together (59). Julia confronts Herman's latent inability to surge forth into the racial unknown with her in conjunction with his ten year old choice to remain in Charleston and all that the south entails. Her newborn racial awareness means an understanding that she is not separate from the black community and 'needs to be around people who will not make her feel…lonely and isolated'.[452] Julia realises that she is not 'different' from those 'relatives, friends and strangers' who 'worked and slaved free for nothin'' (60-1). The history of slavery and the perpetuation of racial discrimination haunt Julia's thoughts. These thoughts are verbalised as she accuses a white society that does not allow a black female to vocalise her sentiments 'whenever somebody was lynched', forcing her to bury and 'swallow down' her opinions (62-3). The issues in Julia's and Herman's racial histories that have remained concealed for ten years in their social seclusion are forced to the surface, and Herman is forced to confront history on Julia's terms. The conversation becomes a retrospective analysis of their long-term relationship, and of how its stagnancy reflects a mutual hidden shame, individual

[451] Margaret Wilkerson, *9 Plays by Black Women* (New York: New American Library, 1986), 71.
[452] Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*, 86.

ignorance and anger in general at a law that denies their feelings for each other. Their histories are effectively personal narratives, disconnected from race; but over the years Julia has become increasingly troubled by the pretense that their love can transcend racial history. Thus Childress portrays the couple as imperfect. As Curb contends, 'they are not heroic crusaders... [but] their situation has opened their eyes to the narrowness of their lives and the pettiness of those who restrict them'.[453]

Herman wearily lies on the bed, both he and Julia having achieved an honest appraisal of their emotions, both happy to still be united. As if already accepting the inevitable, Julia offers her wedding band and tickets to Mattie in an act of sisterhood. Herman's family arrive allowing Julia to demonstrate her new-found black female self-awareness now the 'illusion that she is equal in American society is shattered'.[454] Childress's stage directions demonstrate this self discovery:

> JULIA *silently stares at them, studying each* WOMAN, *seeing them with new eyes. She is going through that rising process wherein she must reject them as the molders and dictators of her life*...Nobody comes in my house…Do whatever you have to do. Win the war. Represent the race. Call the police.(65)

Julia returns to Herman, her former fear finally dissipated through her political stance on the porch, and for his last moments on earth, she evokes an image of them both on a ship leaving for New York waving good-bye to everyone. Their concluding memory is of togetherness and unity, of leaving behind all the positive and negative aspects of a life that was determined to keep them apart, of a society that instils the double cultural encoding of black in a white dominated culture and female in a male dominated one.

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[453] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 61.
[454] Brown-Guillory, *Their Place on the Stage: Black Women Playwrights in America*, 86.

Wedding Band concludes, however, by placing authority within the grasp of Julia, black female hands that would rarely have been allowed such control and potential for future racial empowerment. In this vein, Curb states that *Wedding Band* 'presents the social, economic, moral, religious, legal, political, historical, psychological context in which a black woman…makes independent decisions that affect her life'.[455]

Here in this community, Julia has begun to discover the language and mode of resistance. Mattie is defiant and courageous and Lula is politically perceptive and through Julia's resilience, self-sufficiency and assertiveness, these women are forced 'to recognise their adulthood'.[456] Nelson is provocative and audacious, and Fanny, although often sycophantic to whites and frequently disparaging toward blacks, still considers herself a representative of her race. Thus, collectively they perform communal acts, wherein they pray together and share the persistent humiliations and indignities of racism. When they attempt to help the failing Herman, they do so fully understanding the consequences of the authorities discovering a white man dying in a black woman's bed. Childress, through her characters, knows how resistance can be created in countless small, ostensibly irrelevant ways, and that the principal importance is to maintain a critical and unsparing gaze of resistance toward the historical and contemporary institutions and structures of oppression.

[455] Curb, 'An Unfashionable Tragedy of American Racism: Alice Childress's *The Wedding Band*', 66.
[456] Brown-Guillory, 'Black Women Playwrights: Exorcising Myths', 234.

CHAPTER FIVE:

ALICE WALKER (1944 -)

The Third Life of Grange Copeland.

Poverty, Childhood and the Recovery of Memory.

Figure 11. Sharecropper and son, 1939. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture/Photographs and Prints Division. Number: 9-23.

Introduction

In her novel *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Alice Walker offers her personal rural vision of the South exploring the sharecropping system and what it did to family relationships[457], especially 'the father-daughter connection – and the relationship between men and women'.[458] Alice Childress turned her attention toward wider historical and contemporary institutions and structures of oppression; subsequently Walker traces the ongoing occurrence of familial cruelty precipitated by the effects of racial discrimination, sexism, and economic deprivation. Furthermore, Walker stated that she 'wanted to explore the relationship between parents and children…and…how it happens that the hatred a child can have for a parent becomes inflexible'.[459] Where Childress concentrated purely on adult relationships, so Walker takes this a step further with the significant inclusion of children and the relations *they* form with their family members.

Walker's first novel received both literary praise and negative feedback from black critics relating to her apparently unforgiving treatment of African American men. However, Walker denied such criticism stating that she wanted 'to show the psychological as well as the social effects of white supremacy' upon black men.[460] In Walker's defence, Gloria Steinem commented that *Grange Copeland* 'exposed violence against women years before we had begun to tell the truth in public about beatings by

[457] Alice Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970; London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1985). Hereafter, page numbers cited in the text.
[458] Caroline Evensen Lazo, *Alice Walker: Freedom Writer* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publications, 2000), 60.
[459] John O'Brien, ed., *Interviews with Black Writers* (New York: Liverwright, 1973), 197.
[460] Evensen Lazo, *Alice Walker: Freedom Writer*, 62.

husbands and lovers'.[461] In the same year as the novel's publication, a white female critic in the *Saturday Review*, Josephine Hendin, specifically criticised Walker, accusing her of 'political clichés', that Walker's novel 'ignores the depth and force of the loveless agony she describes', Hendin further questioning whether, as readers, 'one [can] still shed tears for blacks of the lower middle class?'.[462] Walker's written response was to question Hendin's insultingly 'tiresome' comprehension of the novel and remark upon her somewhat racist insensitivity.[463] I argue that this novel maintains a constant agonising depth because of its young female protagonist Ruth Copeland. Ruth comprehensively endows the text with the force of her feelings, loss and eventual hope. Furthermore, Grange counters Hendin's accusation of 'the loveless agony' through his loving and nurturing relationship with Ruth.

With such points in mind, I will argue that Walker does not ignore the black man's genuine search for a positive sense of self, or simply allow Grange, as Hendin wrote, to assuage 'his despair by randomly assaulting whites'.[464] Walker depicts the destructive social relations enforced by a racial system upon the sensibilities of men such as Grange and his son Brownfield and this is explored through the concept of family and all its attendant positive and negative features. The reader is allowed access to the childhood introspection of characters such as Brownfield and Ruth, and with the aid of child developmental theory and psychology, I intend to show that Walker may clearly demonstrate the pitfalls relating to childhood trauma and insecurity, but she also highlights the potential for affirmative regeneration. Against a backdrop of political and

[461] Gloria Steinem, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1995), 300.
[462] Evelyn C. White, *Alice Walker: A Life* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004), 188-189.
[463] White, ibid., 190-191.
[464] White, ibid., 189.

historical change, I intend to examine the relationships between Grange and Brownfield and Ruth along with the women in their lives in order to ascertain how Walker, as a black female author, emotionally depicts such fragile relationships and narratively identifies 'trauma', healing and 'recovery of memory' amid these tentative unions.[465]

The latter of three poignant quotations at the beginning of the novel was told by Richard Wright to Jean-Paul Sartre and exemplifies the characters' destructive and heart-felt emotions: 'The great danger…in the world today is that the very feeling and conception of what is a human being might well be lost' (Preface). Not only does this notion of loss have socio-political connotations regarding the physical and emotional suppression of black sharecropping families in the novel, it also suggests that being 'human' is something to be learned and inherited. For Grange, this loss manifests itself in his inability to be physical or to communicate with his son[466], the suggestion being that this has been 'inherited' from his father. There is an aura of negative replication, namely, that the sins of the fathers will be repeated. However, when Brownfield is physically removed from the lives of his daughters, Ruth, his youngest child, flourishes under the healing care of her grandfather. This father figure has revisited the site of his sins in order to re-imagine his previous parental lack. According to Germaine Greer:

> The only perfect love to be found on earth is not sexual love, which is riddled with hostility and insecurity, but the wordless commitment of families, which takes as its model mother-love. This is not to say that fathers have no place, for father-love, with its driving for self-improvement and discipline, is also essential to survival, but that uncorrected father-love…is a way to annihilation.[467]

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[465] Janice Haaken, 'The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire: Feminist Approaches to Sexual Abuse and Psychic Trauma', *Signs*, 21 (1996), 1069-1094 (1069).
[466] W. Lawrence Hogue, 'History, the Feminist Discourse, and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', *MELUS*, 12 (1985), 45-62 (47).
[467] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 87.

The pertinence of this quotation with regard to *Grange Copeland* is stark when one considers the text's physical and emotional annihilation of mother-love. Ruth's mother Mem is murdered, Brownfield effacing her identity by shooting her in the face (122). In this novel, the mothers tirelessly bring up their children to the best of their often frustrated ability, as they are habitually faced by constant opposition from their husbands. The word 'love' may not be uttered or particularly evident in their daily lives; however, Ruth never appears emotionally insecure regarding her mother's love. Therefore, with regard to *Grange Copeland*, it is important to consider the formation, history and socio-political context of the African American family.

The Historical Black Family

With regard to scholarly discourse concerning 'the black family', distinct and central questions have tended to concentrate upon issues of slavery. Was there a definite slave culture in which slaves shared communal and collective opinions regarding diverse aspects of their lives? To what degree was this culture influenced by white society? Or was that impact and influence the slaves' African heritage? Finally, did distinctive family formations or configurations materialise from this culture? William Wilson, when interpreting the history of the African American family, wrote that '[historical research] demonstrates that neither slavery, nor economic deprivation, nor the migration to urban areas affected black family structure by the first quarter of the twentieth century'.[468] Wilson constructed his argument by referring to Herbert Gutman's 1976 work, in which

[468] William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 64.

Gutman concluded, according to Wilson, that the black households he studied from 1725 to 1925 had conventional two-parent families and a majority of the children were born into traditional 'two-parent' households. [469]

W. E. B DuBois's seminal study at the turn of the twentieth century, diverged from the emphasis on African heritage in order to present an objective depiction of family life, in reaction to invectives that were being directed at the sexual customs of many blacks. DuBois's purpose was to 'show a greater internal differentiation of social conditions' amongst blacks; he maintained that the inability to distinguish class differences is the 'cause of much confusion'.[470] He illustrated the ordinary lives of rural and urban families with the intention of representing the emergence of the 'better classes'. DuBois reflected his generation's view of social class in his description of poor families as the 'lowest type of a country family' and of two of the most stable families with larger incomes as the 'higher type of Negro families'.[471] The institution of slavery was DuBois's explanation for the 'disorganisation' he found in the midst of the poorest black families, pointedly indicating the acute dissimilarities between the family patterns of house servants and those of field hands during slavery. With the former, 'religion and marriage rites received more attention and the Negro monogamic family rose as a dependent offshoot of their feudal slave regime'.[472] Among the latter, in particular those who endured a ruthless overseer, 'there was no family life, no meals, no marriages, no decency, only an endless round of toil and a wild debauch at Christmas time'.[473]

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[469] Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage, 1976), 10, 45, 118.
[470] W. E. B. DuBois, *The Negro American Family* (1909; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 127-130.
[471] DuBois, ibid.
[472] DuBois, ibid., 47.
[473] DuBois, ibid.

DuBois also noted that slavery had a crippling effect on the slave father, who lacked the authority to govern or protect his family. This is seen in Walker's novel when Brownfield realises that the white man, Mr Shipley, 'who drove the truck' out to the cotton fields in which Grange works 'caused his father to don a mask that was more impenetrable than his usual silence' (8). Furthermore, DuBois explains that the black slave's 'wife could be made his master's concubine; his daughter could be outraged, his son whipped, or he himself sold away without being able to protest or lift a preventing finger'.[474] It is this very concept and lack of masculine control that haunts Grange and thus forces him to negatively reassert and recreate an element of power over his wife and son. As Claudia Lawrence-Webb argues, 'patriarchy', as exemplified in this instance by Mr Shipley, is a sociological system that has its 'greatest effect in the private lives of men and women'.[475] Thus, according to S. Walby, 'if patriarchy is defined as a "system of social structures in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women,"' one must assume that relationships between couples such as Grange and Margaret will be 'inherently unequal and hierarchical'.[476] Somewhat unsurprisingly, Brownfield saw his mother 'like a dog in some ways. She didn't have a thing to say that did not in some way show her submission to his father' (5). With regard to women such as Margaret, DuBois asserted that the position of the mother was also undermined; during slavery 'her children had little care or attention…and she could be separated from her family at any time by the

[474] DuBois, ibid., 49.
[475] Claudia Lawrence-Webb et. al., 'African American Intergender Relationships: A Theoretical Exploration of Roles, Patriarchy and Love', *Journal of Black Studies*, 34 (2004), 623-639 (627).
[476] S. Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 20.

master's command or by his death or debts'.[477] Thus history, class, economics and racism play an integral role in the lives of sharecropping families such as Grange Copeland's:

> In the 1930s, sharecropping was as much a system of slavery as that state which had existed for Blacks in this country prior to 1860. Invisible chains of debt took the place of rope and shackles, but the mental state which existed during slavery did not change much…few acceptable escapes existed [and] Men who may have been brave enough to steal away…could just as easily find themselves hanging from trees the next morning [or] find themselves on new plantations which were really no better than the ones from which they escaped.[478]

In DuBois's view, a weakened black family emerged from slavery with a dual set of sexual mores. One pattern, which transpired from those of the house servants, was monogamic with established two-parent families, as suggested by Gutman. Another set of sexual customs was associated with field hands, and these family configurations were described as single parents and children born to unwed mothers; Margaret 'had no wedding ring' (5). DuBois attributes these differences in sexual behaviour among blacks to the institution of slavery: '[T]he great body of field hands were raped of their own sex customs and provided with no binding new ones'.[479] Thus there exists the lack of affirmative reinforcement within the family structure and the desperate need to formulate positive possibilities for future generations. Grange is reduced to little more than a work-horse in the cotton fields. Walker emphasises such a degrading level of humanity through Grange's sexual relations and attitudes toward women. Feeling he is treated as a beast means he acts and treats Margaret accordingly in their relationship. Thus Grange engages in the very deeds by which others had defined him. Walker cultivates a different notion of

[477] DuBois, *The Negro American Family*, 49.
[478] Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 34.
[479] DuBois, *The Negro American Family*, 49.

sexuality in the character of Grange. By allowing Grange to develop and become conscious of what has happened to him, Walker moves toward one of James Baldwin's thematic concerns in proposing that racial maturity is equivalent to sexual acknowledgment. For Baldwin the concern was more particularly homosexual, that the 'uncloseting of sexual desire' was just another 'step on the path towards the uncloseting of the racially prejudiced mind'.[480] For Grange, only true acceptance of his past wrongdoings and his masculine black self will 'uncloset' him from stereotypical and self-imposed psychological constraints; his sexual degradation of Margaret fed his notion of his own racial subservience. For Grange in particular, if a man's capacity to support his family has been erased, and if his actual home and hearth has been attacked and invaded by the force which has denied him respectable employment, then he is genuinely emasculated and, by extension, literally without sexual power. Grange may sexually pursue other women such as local prostitute Josie, but that does not change the fact that he has no control over his own bedroom and over his own wife.[481] Lawrence-Webb succinctly states that 'two centuries of negotiation around gender roles has been a source of great stress…on…relationships between African Americans'.[482] As illustrated through the characters of Grange and Margaret, Brownfield and Mem, the result is 'conflict and confusion, as both men and women grapple with meeting their basic needs for sustenance'.[483]

[480] Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, ix.
[481] Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, 37.
[482] Lawrence-Webb, 'African American Intergender Relationships', 629.
[483] Lawrence-Webb, ibid.

The First Life of Grange Copeland - Brownfield's Childhood

We first meet young Brownfield as he waves goodbye to relatives whilst standing 'close to his mother' (3). The image lends itself to a picture of fragmented families in both a geographical and economic sense. Brownfield's cousins 'told him that his father worked for a cracker and that the cracker owned him. They told him that their own daddy…had gone to Philadelphia to be his own boss. They told him that his mother wanted to leave his father…His cousins told Brownfield this and much more. They bewildered, excited and hurt him' (4-5). What ensues in the narrative is a sense of already buried expectations juxtaposed with what is, even by now, a tense father and son relationship. When Brownfield's desire to live in the North is met with a flat 'Well, we don't', Brownfield is more shocked by his father's verbal response: 'His father almost never spoke to him unless they had company. Even then he acted as if talking to his son was a strain, a burdensome requirement' (5). Silence it seems has a more sinister quality; it is the verbal gaps and the emotional lack that exemplifies the oppression that Grange, the father, feels.

This silence pervades Brownfield's childhood, his isolation further epitomised through the eerily noiseless environment he inhabits. The textual sensation is one of absolute suppression, of a basic inability for the black population in the South to escape an all-pervading stifling of their voices. The economic imperative, in order for the family to survive, means that Margaret is forced to leave Brownfield at home until he too is old enough, at six, to work in the 'generally silent' cotton fields (7). Through tiredness and habit, the adults whisper intermittently to each other: 'The buzz of their conversations became part of the silence' (7). Concomitantly, Harold Hellenbrand suggests that this

noiseless situation emotionally 'weighs down the Copelands and their fellow pickers'.[484] Therefore, I argue that the children learn by rote that speech is of minimal necessity and a forbidden form of self-identity. So it is not surprising that as adults, certain personal forms of communication may become deficient, with doubt and resentment superseding trust and respect between members of a family.[485] This situation becomes the antithesis to studies that claim verbal communication should 'be a more dominant feature of parent-child relationships, necessitating greater emphasis on the content and meaning of parent-child interactions'.[486] This lack of such communication means Brownfield lives in fear of his father because he feels no intimate correlation with such a volatile individual who appears devoid of any emotion. However, this deficient verbal contact results from a life sapped of its spirit, of a man left lifeless by the harshness of his working and living environments, of being interminably indebted to a white man. This silence, this embarrassed desperation to survive becomes ingrained in the behaviour of the next generation. Brownfield similarly inherits Grange's 'cold nervousness', a smothered intensity when in the presence of white skin (9). Furthermore, as a result of Margaret's suppression and ensuing depression, Brownfield will always bear the marks of 'a host of adverse outcomes in infancy, such as language and cognitive problems…insecure attachment…social interactive difficulties…and behavioral problems'.[487] I believe this negates criticism regarding Walker's unforgiving treatment of black men in the novel.

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[484] Harold Hellenbrand, 'Speech, after Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland'*, *Black American Literature Forum*, 20 (1986), 113-128 (114).
[485] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 50.
[486] Graeme Russell and Alan Russell, 'Mother-Child and Father-Child Relationships in Middle Childhood', *Child Development*, 58 (1987), 1573-1585 (1573).
[487] Stephen M. Petterson and Alison Burke Albers, 'Effects of Poverty and Maternal Depression on Early Child Development', *Child Development*, 72 (2001), 1794-1813 (1795).

Additionally, Hendin's question, 'Can one still shed tears for blacks of the lower middle class?'[488] must be answered in the affirmative.

Family life follows the same drunken, violent, and sullen cycle, with Brownfield as both victim and witness to Grange's physical and verbal atrocities. Thus Brownfield as the maltreated and neglected child turns into an additional discursive detail in the text. As Hogue contends, the 'father-son relation' is 'constituted in a language of violence and domination that reflects the master-servant relation between Grange and the white landowner'.[489] As Brownfield enters adolescence, the silent resilience of Margaret is forcibly transformed into a newly painted and yet haggard personality with an effusion of curses and the scent of gin. An infant 'half-brother', described as the 'product' of Margaret's changed life-style, lies in a crib in the corner (16). One reason for this metamorphosis is Josie, a working Madam and owner of the local brothel. With both parents 'caught up in relations that render them powerless' to act in a positive manner, Brownfield is totally alone.[490] As an exemplar of 'maltreated children and children with an experiential history of interadult violence exposure' Brownfield displays 'emotion dysregulation'. [491] This is an 'emotion-based' deficit that will later contribute to his 'disruptive processing of emotionally arousing events' which sequentially will influence his behaviour.[492] Thus, as Robert James Butler suggests, Brownfield's narrative can be considered as concentrating 'all that is negative about Southern culture'.[493] However, this

[488] White, *Alice Walker: A Life*, 188-189.
[489] Hogue, 'History, the Feminist Discourse, and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 48.
[490] Hogue, ibid., 49.
[491] Angeline Maughan and Dante Cicchetti, 'Impact of Child Maltreatment and Interadult Violence on Children's Emotion Regulation Abilities and Socioemotional Adjustment', *Child Development*, 73 (2002), 1525-1542 (1526).
[492] Maughan and Cicchetti, ibid.
[493] Robert James Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', *African American Review*, 27 (1993), 195-204 (196).

general statement only considers the socio-political and not the personal negative experiences of childhood that cannot be merely centred on the South.

At a young age, Brownfield learns that sex can be used as a tool of oppression and as an instrument of emotional abuse. Grange's affair with Josie makes Margaret feel rejected as both a life partner and as a sexual woman and thus the cycle rolls relentlessly onward. Brownfield has difficulty in recalling the time when he loved Margaret as a mother, and for this, he blames his father. However, 'what Brownfield could not forgive was that in the drama of their lives his father and mother forgot they were not alone' (20). This situation mirrors various studies that conclude 'parents who are busy dealing with major life stressors may experience attentional fatigue and not have the attentional resources… to engage' with their children.[494] This isolation from both parents becomes more poignant one night when Brownfield awakens to find his mother absent and his father intently inspecting his son's 'head and face' (21). Grange's hand draws back 'without touching him' and Brownfield knew 'his father would never be back, that he hated him for everything and always would' (21). This fragmentation of the family unit emphasises its inability to sustain a variety of pressures. Thus subsequent psychological stress and disintegration of communication between husband and wife results, Diane Baumrind argues, in 'deficiencies in caregiving', with such 'marital discord' weakening the guidance of children.[495] Grange represents a black fatherhood and masculinity that cannot cope with resulting anger and loss of self-esteem in not being able to provide for his family, turning to alcohol, gambling and prostitutes in an effort to obliterate reality:

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[494] Angela R. Wiley et. al., 'Shelter in a Time of Storm: Parenting in Poor Rural African American Communities', *Family Relations*, 51 (2002), 265-273 (270).
[495] Diane Baumrind, 'The Social Context of Child Maltreatment', *Family Relations*, 43 (1994), 360-368 (363).

'Many men simply gave up on themselves and left their homes, never to return and likely believing their families were better off without them'.[496]

For Brownfield this means life without a father figure, albeit a negative one. Even though Grange's dubious parenting skills cause the conflict and create the obstacles in his son's young life, at least his presence created *some* semblance of a unified family unit. An ordinary boy at the beginning of the novel, 'Brownfield becomes the book's most degraded character, for in accepting his "place" in Southern society, he degenerates into a killer of families and a poisoner of innocent life'.[497] Both background and childhood perceptions of adult role models are considerable causes in shaping future behaviour and success in relationships; however, as children are inclined to emulate their parents, the black male child who naturally aspires to be like his father, will develop disrespect for women when he sees his father do so: 'Black males can express their sexuality to their children not only by being physically indiscreet, but by their actions and words as well'.[498] However, it is equally important to consider the effect on Brownfield regarding the subsequent physical degradation of Margaret. Ironically, Margaret, through a form of mimesis, becomes as emotionally bereft and as spiritually corrupted as her husband. Within weeks of Grange's departure, Brownfield finds his dead mother in the clearing near their shack 'curled up in a lonely sort of way, away from her child, as if she had spent the last moments on her knees' (21). Grange's leaving, according to Butler, 'is to engrave deep emotional scars into [Brownfield's] character which ultimately stunt[s] his growth'.[499]

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[496] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 90.
[497] Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 198.
[498] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 100.
[499] Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 197.

Economic Necessities

When physically on the land owned by Mr Shipley, Brownfield is invisible regarding his socio-political standing. When he journey's north, Brownfield echoes his father's attempt to forge his own autonomy and future, to be free of financial and emotional constraints. Interestingly, despite the negative influences and constant ruination of hope, Brownfield moves into his future full of optimism. However, hunger drives him to a 'baked gray two-room shack' (27-28), Brownfield going toward the most poverty-stricken abode because he knows that the occupant will be black and more likely to welcome him. The person in question is Mamie Lou Banks, a single mother of eight children whose domestic work and family formation reflects early twentieth-century scholarly observations that many black women were raising children without a spouse present.

> A great number of black men with limited formal education father children early in life…for the most part they demonstrate instability and erratic behavior, as opposed to accountability and responsibility for their offspring's future. Often leaving their mates and children behind…to abandon more women and children.[500]

Mamie tells Brownfield, 'one of they daddies is dead from being in the war…The other…is now married…down the road…The other…shot by the old man he was working for' (30). However, despite the lack of money earned by a male head of the family unit, women such as Mamie were more likely to attain an 'unlimited field of employment in the domestic and household industries' unlike their masculine counterparts who tended to have 'no fixed industrial status…and [were] confined to the

[500] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 90.

more onerous and less attractive mode of toil'.[501] Mamie's children have different fathers, the five eldest being 'up Norse' (29). Again, she mirrors DuBois's view that slavery's legacy was to perpetuate particular sexual behaviours which were connected with field workers, and these family formations were described as single parents and children born to unwed mothers. However, Mamie's situation does testify to a hitherto overlooked inner strength of poor single-mother families. In this manner, Walker challenges what revisionist scholars have described as an insensitive and critical bias of early family research that blamed the poor for their poverty.[502] Furthermore, Walker reacts and responds to what has been 'a particular focus of negative attention' upon 'a large number of single-mother households within the African American community'.[503]

Brownfield continues his quest for both father and future; however, he unwittingly walks through the doors of Josie's bar. Her immediate overbearing sexuality and indecent advertising of her daughter's body both repulses and fascinates a naïve Brownfield. Josie asks his name and where he has travelled from, thus gaining essential knowledge and more importantly placing her in a position of power; she now knows he is Grange's son (35). Josie, the shrewd businesswoman that she is, has successfully 'bought' a suitable replacement for Grange; her body, and that of her daughter's, pays his 'wages' as he unwittingly toils for an individual who, like Mr Shipley, cares little about his sense of worth or autonomy. In this vein, Theodore Mason Jr. contends that 'for all his desires to become a creator of his own fictions, Brownfield is hopelessly derivative as an artist. All

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[501] Donna L. Franklin, 'Sharecropping and the Rural Proletariat', in *Ensuring Inequality: The Structural Transformation of the African-American Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 38-39.
[502] Shirley A. Hill, 'Black Families: Beyond revisionist Scholarship', in *Black Intimacies: A Gender Perspective on Families and Relationships* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2005), 55.
[503] Deborah A. Salem et. al., 'Effects of Family Structure, Family Process, and Father Involvement on Psychosocial Outcomes among African American Adolescents', *Family Relations*, 47 (1998), 331-341 (331).

he can do is recapitulate and revoice the fictions in which he has been cast'.[504] Josie's niece, Mem, appears to initially offer a potential escape from such cyclical behaviour; however, I argue it is the weight of Brownfield's *emotional* problems that will prove too heavy rather than the wider influences of poverty.

Resulting from Mem's education, learning and loving become intertwined in Brownfield's mind; therefore, any other interested male party would potentially extinguish all hope of *his* personal growth and pleasure in her presence. Josie and her daughter Lorene become rapidly insignificant as he realises that 'he was a pawn in a game that [they] enjoyed' (47). Mem is considered a fresh and worthy prize to be won, however, Brownfield and Mem's marriage does not create the changes for which he hoped: 'Three years later…he was working the same farm and in debt up to his hatbrim' under 'the shadow of eternal bondage' (49). As Mason points out, Walker again uses the image of 'the sharecropper's cabin as a charged metaphorical structure indicating the fundamental…entrapment of its occupants'.[505] Furthermore, the pastoral setting is imbued with images of 'despair and decay'.[506] Consequently, as Butler suggests, Brownfield 'becomes entrapped by his father's "first" life, an existence of grinding poverty'.[507] Again, critical attention tends toward the economic as opposed to the psychological. An added emotional insult is when Brownfield has to teach his fragile young daughter Daphne the 'disgusting business of handmopping the cotton bushes with

[504] Theodore O. Mason, Jr., 'Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*: The Dynamics of Enclosure', *Callaloo*, 39 (1989), 297-309 (302).
[505] Mason Jr., ibid., 297.
[506] Mason Jr., ibid., 298.
[507] Robert James Butler, 'Making a Way Out of No Way: The Open Journey in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', *Black American Literature Forum*, 22 (1988), 65-79 (71).

arsenic' (53). The reader watches her struggle and stumble and yet again continue the cycle of child labour within sharecropping families (53).

Daphne is as scared of her father as Brownfield was of Grange and equally as frightened of the white boss. Hellenbrand argues that Brownfield 'never recognizes how thoroughly his life repeats his father's'[508], yet the introspective text shows that Brownfield realises through *Daphne* that his life absolutely reflects his father's. Thus, Hellenbrand is correct in arguing that Brownfield 'does recognize his children's poverty is a repetition', but not in the generalised assumption that 'there is much more that [Brownfield] does not see'.[509] Brownfield is much more aware of his life than Hellenbrand suggests, as anger, alcohol and Josie's body become the repeated routines for obliterating reality. Brownfield's masculine pride and 'battered ego' compel him to reduce Mem to his uneducated level, thus forcing her into domestic work rather than a better paid teaching job. Hence, as Lawrence-Webb et. al. indicate, 'female autonomy…is viewed as a threat to male authority rather than as a complement to the male gender role'.[510] Additionally, if black women such as Mem 'perform the provider function, they maintain a degree of power that thwarts male dominance'.[511]

White economic power and patriarchy infuse the personal and emotional lives of individuals such as Mem and Brownfield and illustrate Walker's effort to challenge patriarchy and racism, which within its painful rhetoric, as she herself has said, requires 'survival whole'.[512] This survival is not financial but spiritual, an emotional wellbeing and with Brownfield blaming his failure on Mem and her consequent disintegration,

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[508] Hellenbrand, 'Speech, after Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland'*, 117.
[509] Hellenbrand, ibid.
[510] Lawrence-Webb, 'African American Intergender Relationships', 630.
[511] Lawrence-Webb, ibid., 631.
[512] Ikenna Dieke, ed., *Critical Essays on Alice Walker* (Westport, CT:, Greenwood Press, 1999), 6.

neither character has a chance of such 'survival whole'. Lawrence-Webb argues that the implications of patriarchy and presumed gender roles for African Americans are 'couched in the political, economic, and social framework that has special meaning for their survival'.[513] However, Grange and Ruth demonstrate the necessary staying power because she learns 'from Grange the spiritual and practical tools necessary for survival' and 'he learns to love'.[514] Grange Copeland's transformation begins when he stops hating himself as white America has taught him to do (154). The next stage of Grange's transformation begins when he stops hating altogether and decides to simply ignore white people: 'he realized he could not fight all the whites he met. Nor was he interested in it any longer...For the time being, he would withdraw completely from them make a life that need not acknowledge them' (155).

The Second Life of Grange Copeland – Grange Returns

As Brownfield returns to Josie, he learns of her long-standing relationship with Grange. Interestingly 'he had waited to know this part of his father's life' (61). As the years pass, Grange becomes a distant memory; however, his return means Josie 'hastily pushed Brownfield away; pushed him as if he were as odious as a toad, as inconsequential as some kind of harmless lizard' (63). The oxymoronic 'odious' and 'harmless' are used to describe an often impotent Brownfield; his black masculinity has suffered parallel to his emotional and physically violent sexualised behaviour toward Mem. Her prominent role in sustaining her family 'is seen as counterproductive' to her relationship with

[513] Lawrence-Webb, 'African American Intergender Relationships', 627.
[514] Pia Thielmann, 'Alice Walker and the "Man Question"', in *Critical Essays on Alice Walker*, 73.

Brownfield because it undermines 'his masculinity'.[515] Interestingly, Brownfield has predominantly been enveloped in and involved with women. From Margaret to Josie and finally to Mem and their three daughters, there has been no male influence. Despite Mem's constructive attempts, Brownfield has lived as boy and man within a totally female environment. Scholars have asserted that this often

> results in compensatory attitudes and behavior. These attitudes can be positive or negative depending on the history and experience of the black men involved. Women alone often have trouble providing a stable financial and even loving household due to socioeconomic stress. Often a boy in a female-dominated household becomes confused about his role as a boy. Early feelings of powerlessness and dependency may develop into disrespect for his mother… Later…to black women in adult relationships.[516]

This succinctly describes Brownfield's past and his confused feelings of love and loathing toward his mother, his present predicament being further complicated by the dramatic entrance of the father whilst Josie and the son share a bed. The greying Grange appears as an apparition before them and despite his empty threats, Brownfield 'realized immediately, and it made him sob, that he was still afraid of him. He might still have been a child from the fear he felt' (64). Confusion and powerlessness further invade a soul already immeasurably scarred from fear and hatred. To exacerbate these emotions, Brownfield learns that within 'two weeks Grange and Josie were married' (64).

From a narrative viewpoint, Walker juxtaposes the return of Grange with the birth of Mem and Brownfield's daughter, Ruth, the third child who will allow Grange a third chance to access Walker's phenomenon of 'survival whole'. Grange's reappearance

[515] Lawrence-Webb, 'African American Intergender Relationships', 626.
[516] Smith, *Walking Proud*, 101.

causes a 'new social formation', as Hogue describes it, 'a new ideologeme' emerges.[517] Now that Grange is on the brink of replacing his hatred for white people with love for Ruth, 'he no longer needs to oppress women and abuse children'.[518] Simultaneously, Brownfield's guilt for being drunk and ineffectual as Mem gave birth becomes assuaged by his anger at Grange's presence. Not only does this moment highlight their parenting issues, it also raises future complications regarding relationships between grandparents and grandchildren as Grange assumes the role of authoritative carer once Ruth's existence is discovered. Only on his return does Grange fully understand the depth of his son's bitterness and resentment and further guilty acknowledgment and reflections of his past are realised when Grange considers Mem's 'mangy' appearance and Brownfield's inability to act as a decent husband and father (72). Images of past and present transparently overlap, thus highlighting the stark similarities between father and son. Additionally, never having the love of his father, Hogue argues Brownfield is 'incapable of loving his daughters' and that 'this brutal kind of relationship is passed from one generation to another'.[519] The suggestion is that the young Grange suffered in a similar way and yet, by skipping a generation, he manages to break the vicious circle and love Ruth unconditionally.

For Daphne and Ornette, trauma and dissociated recollections become intrinsic to their early experiences and their story-telling highlights aspects of memory and the individual creation of anxiety and ambiguity as seen with Audre Lorde and her elder sisters (*Zami* 46). In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Walker battles with the complexity of attaining a genuine description of the past, more especially, about how we divide and

[517] Hogue, 'History, the Feminist Discourse, and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 53.
[518] Hogue, ibid.
[519] Hogue, ibid., 59.

resolve the revelatory and self-protective characteristics of story-telling. She discusses how, on finding herself 'way off into an improbable tale', the realisation is that 'something horrible has happened' in the past leading to a conscious inability 'to think about it'.[520] The question Walker asks is: 'do you think this is how storytelling came into being? That the story is only the mask for the truth?'[521] For Daphne and Ornette in particular, it is irrelevant whether their memories or 'stories' are authentic or not, because at this juncture in their young lives, emotional survival in any way possible is all they can hope to attain.

Life for the family in all its harshness continues, Brownfield still verbally and physically abusing Mem, with the three sisters silent witnesses to his actions. Mem, at least, attempts to find a new family home, subsequently raising the hopes of her older daughters. Barbara Christian describes Mem's 'desire to have a house' as 'the major conflict in the battle between the Copelands'.[522] Mem endeavours to change her children's lives for the better; she wants to break the succession of white ownership that means that they must live in dilapidated shacks. However, as Butler indicates, Brownfield 'becomes a pathological figure intent on destroying his wife and children when they display any signs of rejecting the static roles which Southern society imposes on them'[523], but, it must be argued, upon him in particular. He will go to any lengths to force his already physically downtrodden wife into further submission by obstinately moving them to yet another 'white man's property like in slavery times' (84). Thus Brownfield not

[520] Alice Walker, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 130.
[521] Walker, ibid.
[522] Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 189-190.
[523] Butler, 'Making a Way Out of No Way', 71.

only interprets Mem's 'drive for movement and freedom as an indictment of his own depleted life'[524], but is determined to reposition his family within their previous situation.

Daphne and Ornette remain scared of their father whilst Mem becomes subsumed in a mist of hatred that drives her quest to find a home, preferably without her husband. Trapped between a newly empowered wife and a white master, Brownfield is left with no pride or positive sense of masculinity. His only form of control is to brutally ruin Mem's dreams of a future for her daughters (91). The narrative issue of the house echoes the metaphorical concept of 'structures' that become 'more entrapping and debilitating for this family'.[525] As Mason points out, the 'homes' that Brownfield has found 'have the same kind of effect on all of them, but particularly on Mem'.[526] Again, this makes the issue here more gendered and psychological than economic. As the violence escalates, 'Mem threatens her husband with a gun and tears his defences apart'.[527] Mem's desperation in her struggle for security and stability demonstrates that women 'are willing to confront their men and if necessary move them out of their way'; however, this inescapably attacks 'the men's definition of themselves as men'.[528] This new-found sense of empowerment is manifestly juxtaposed with Grange's latest involvement with the family. From the day of Ruth's symbolic and literal birth, both Grange and Mem have embarked on a journey of self-discovery, searching inwards for their individual psychological strength and survival. However, for Mem in particular, her biological body will ultimately be her down-fall: 'Brownfield lay in wait for the return of Mem's weakness. The cycles of her months and years brought it' (101). Brownfield's

[524] Butler, ibid.
[525] Mason Jr., 'Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*: The Dynamics of Enclosure', 300.
[526] Mason Jr., ibid.
[527] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, 183.
[528] Christian, ibid., 190.

humiliation becomes a profound loathing and desire to crush her spirit as two failed pregnancies physically destroy what was left of her health, confidence and hope of a brighter future in her new home. There is another sense of recurring history; 'oppressed and abused by the white man, Grange abuses and mistreats his wife and son', submission, oppression and neglect being 'repeated facts'.[529]

Another baby is born and dies and Mem further removes herself physically and emotionally from the family (110). The three girls are subjected to and witness to nightly verbal and physical abuse, Ornette and Ruth seeing Brownfield 'in a more distant, impersonal way' than Daphne (111). This emotional detachment is narratively juxtaposed with the physical distance that Ruth senses when waking up suddenly in Grange's house. As readers, we are unaware of the events leading to this seemingly confusing occurrence as Walker deftly discloses the trauma of the previous night through Ruth's unfolding memory:

> Brownfield began to curse and came and stood on the steps until Mem got within the circle of the light. Then he aimed the gun with drunken accuracy right into her face and fired…What Ruth now remembered with nausea and and a feeling of cold dying, was Mem lying faceless. (122).

Walker has shown thus far, in this novel of three generations, the pernicious social relations imposed by a corroding racial caste system upon the sensibilities of men such as Grange and Brownfield. Walker examines these forces that stimulate the psychological deterioration in a male protagonist such as Brownfield to act in such a brutal way, thus demonstrating the personal pain that has systematically warped his judgement.

[529] Hogue, 'History, the Feminist Discourse, and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 49.

Brownfield's frustrated masculinity means that he denies his wife's and daughters' assertion of self-worth. So, despite Mem attempting to raise the family's standard of living, Brownfield must methodically destroy first her health and then her spirit; finally, he literally effaces her identity and renders her silent. That Walker intends the scene as an affirmation of the universality of female cultural effacement is clear from her statement that Mem, 'after the French *la même*, meaning "the same"', was so named because the actual murder victim on whom Walker based the story 'was symbolic of all women'.[530] The murder spurned emotions whereby she embodied and symbolised for Alice Walker all her own past and present female relatives. Thus it becomes clear why Walker believes that 'the truth about any subject only comes when all sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one'.[531] This raises the question: 'How can a family, a community, a race, a nation, a world, be healthy and strong if one half dominates the other half through threats, intimidation and actual acts of violence?'.[532] Walker continues to stress how violence saps the strength and creativity of the entire population, thus affecting both victim and aggressor. The oppression of one black woman becomes the oppression of her children which in turn becomes the oppression of a race. However, through Ruth's recollections of her mother and Grange's deification of Mem, her incontestable strength and spirit is allowed to live through the narrative; her life at least is given some form of meaning by means of her daughter's eventual sense of self worth and 'survival whole'.

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[530] Alice Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, (1970; London: Phoenix, 2004), 316.
[531] Alice Walker, 'Beyond the Peacock', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (London: The Women's Press, 1987), 49.
[532] Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, 316.

The Third Life of Grange Copeland – 'Survival Whole'

For Grange Copeland, his immediate attempt to comfort and nurture Ruth after her mother's death is a strong and positive stance, and once again, is the very thing that will ultimately connect him with his inner self and with humanity. Just as much as his initial departure was the symbolic and official recognition that all his hopes for family life and security had dissolved, Grange's reappearance in Brownfield's life is similarly emblematic considering his entrance is immediately after the birth of the girl who will enable his 'survival whole'. In an almost biblical manner, Grange arrives with gifts of food at the birthplace of a child in a shack. His journey South is to a 'world of his own creation…a quest for the same sort of life-giving space that the Puritans sought in a New World "sanctuary"'.[533] On a simpler level, he also arrives with the ability to organise his son into action. Now, the morning after Mem's murder, he is the first body to whom Ruth clings for emotional succour (123). As the novel develops from this point, Grange will realise that his original lack of care for his family and his departure were indications of how severely he had allowed himself to be dehumanised and emasculated, of how his negative sense of self meant he was incapable of accepting his responsibility for his own thoughts, behaviour and actions.[534] As Butler suggests, Grange's return 'produces a dramatic change in his character as he becomes a loving surrogate father for Ruth'[535], and an emotionally secure 'home' will be the solution. For Ruth, despite suffering mistreatment, 'a particularly good relationship with…even a close parent surrogate, can

[533] Butler, 'Making a Way Out of No Way', 73.
[534] Walker, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, 318.
[535] Butler, 'Making a Way Out of No Way', 72.

mitigate but not eliminate the effect of marital turmoil'.[536] For Grange, his relationship with Ruth will equip him with the tools whereby he can acknowledge his failings as a father and a man. From a psychological perspective, their bridging of the generations is one that will heal the emotional trauma and familial rift created by Grange and Brownfield. From a socio-political viewpoint, Walker successfully subverts the notion of the 'poor family' and the ensuing presumption of child abuse and neglect, for as Diana Baumrind suggests, 'the relationship between economic status and child maltreatment is not entirely artifactual'.

Walker has described *Grange Copeland* as 'a novel that is chronological in structure, or one devoted, more or less, to rigorous realism'.[537] That rationale is undercut by ruptures generated by the narration of competing histories, as seen through the multiple characters who are involved. Despite the title of the novel, Grange is not the principal focus of the narrative; he is a vehicle through which the broader racial experience is narrated. This is then displaced by previous subsidiary narratives that centre distinctively on the emotional experiences of black women and their children. Besides highlighting the relationship between Grange and Brownfield, the novel commits itself to the stories of Mem, Margaret, Josie and Ruth, whose symbolic stories serve significant textual and ideological functions. Their voices may have been socially silenced in some way, misused and abused; however, Walker succinctly revivifies and dignifies their 'stories' through her narrative creativity.

Regarding the close bond between Grange and Ruth, their specific 'story' stresses issues of both rebellion and liberation. Their relationship has been created from Grange's

[536] Baumrind, 'The Social Context of Child Maltreatment', 363.
[537] Claudia Tate, ed., *Black Women Writers at Work* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 176.

selfish, albeit racially motivated need to leave his family and the shackles of sharecropping and all this entails. Grange exemplifies how black men have been 'psychologically, socially, and politically emasculated because of the sharecropping system under which they initially live and work'.[538] Trudier Harris continues to highlight a structure that depletes the

> life energy from men who must see reflected in the eyes of those for whom they work the evaluation that they are less than human. That evaluation combines with their own knowledge that they can do very little to improve their situations and turns them, especially Brownfield, into self-destructive, brutalizing beasts.[539]

Grange rebels against expected norms by becoming financially independent. Now socio-economically free and with his grand-daughter, Grange embarks on his personal odyssey toward self-recognition and thus becomes the living heritage from which Ruth can learn and develop as a young racially aware black woman. The boundaries of their 'grange' and 'land' will, as Mason suggests, allow 'human dreams and desires' to prosper.[540] Within this space, Walker does not employ a matrilineal notion of identity as in Audre Lorde's *Zami* or sense of black sisterhood as in *Wedding Band*. Ruth will never have knowledge of an ancestral black mother, a mother who is part of a wider female tradition; she alone will need to search for alternative female means of reclaiming black 'woman power'. However, just as *Zami* represents how the past, present and future intertwine through memories and realities of the women in Lorde's life, Ruth, along with the other

[538] Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, 36.
[539] Harris, ibid.
[540] Mason Jr., 'Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*: The Dynamics of Enclosure', 305.

female characters in *Grange Copeland* all similarly offer something in order to comprehend silence, anger, pain, sacrifice, love and honour.

Whether utilising her participation in the civil rights movement, or disputing that her fiction must speak to the 'survival of the race', or enhancing her agenda for a 'womanist' ideology, Walker's narrative tackles the social, personal and political concerns of *families* in a predominantly 'white' governed America.[541] She concisely declared her situation in an interview:

> I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women…black women are the most fascinating in the world… Next to them, I place the old people - male and female – who persist in their beauty in spite of everything. How do they do this, knowing what they do? Having lived what they have lived?...it lures me into their lives.[542]

Families are the force behind a novel such as *Grange Copeland*, and Grange, 'having lived what' he has 'lived' psychologically and verbally refuses to allow Ruth to follow a similar path even to the extent of not allowing her to be seen riding 'on top of the cotton all the way to town', emphatically stating, ''You not some kind of field hand' (125).

Just as affirmative reinforcement of certain forms of behaviour will create a positive psychological and racial view of her 'self', so memory will become an intrinsic element to Ruth's emotional healing and it is Grange who discusses Brownfield and Mem, 'Especially Mem who was a saint' (126). Such deification leads to an eventual split between Grange and Josie, thus driving her away to search for emotional support from the imprisoned Brownfield. Walker deftly portrays this disquiet through Ruth whose

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[541] Elliott Butler-Evans, *Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989), 127.
[542] Walker, 'From an Interview', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 250-251.

perspective 'possesses an intellectual insight that is…more mature than her chronological years and intellectual development'.[543] The tension is narratively weighted with literary stasis whereby Ruth 'sees' Mem's dismembered figure, Walker accentuating her 'callused and *warm*' hands, her 'chapped and *soft*' lips and eyes brimming with 'tough, *gentle* sadness and pain' (127) [my emphasis]. Hellenbrand suggests that 'subtle dialectic' is implied 'in which Ruth…recovers her' mother's identity.[544] Walker thus encapsulates the fate of black women, who are seen synonymously as 'exquisite butterflies trapped in an evil honey, toiling away their lives in an era, a century that did not acknowledge them, except as "the *mule* of the world"'.[545]

Just as much as memory serves a healing purpose, music and movement become integral to Ruth's emotional development as a young black girl; consequently, as Butler suggests, Ruth's character provides a creative 'alternative to the meaninglessness of Brownfield's life'.[546] Grange introduces her to an expressive and intimate space within which dancing teaches her 'she had a body' (133); as Harris argues, this is a 'way to seal the bond between them and to identify their unity against a hostile and un-understanding world'.[547] Grange also teaches Ruth an 'untaught history through his dance';

> She glimpsed a homeland she had never known and felt the pattering of the drums. Dancing was a warm electricity that stretched, connecting them with other dancers moving across the seas. Through her grandfather's old and beautifully supple limbs she learned how marvellous was the grace with which she moved. (134)

[543] Hogue, 'History, the Feminist Discourse, and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 55.
[544] Hellenbrand, 'Speech, after Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 124.
[545] Walker, 'From an Interview', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* 232.
[546] Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 198.
[547] Trudier Harris, 'Folklore in the Fiction of Alice Walker: A Perpetuation of Historical and Literary Traditions', *Black American Literature Forum,* 11 (1977), 3-8 (6).

This movement liberates her from a discriminating society and empowerment and, as Butler states, will ensure that she creates 'her own self by moving in her own ways'.[548] This 'dance' means that even though Ruth may be 'removed from family', she is 'profoundly united in her cultural past'.[549] A connection and foundation are formulated upon which Ruth can build her future life, and yet parallel to this, Grange's existence appears to contain an emptiness which Ruth remains unaware of and one that Grange cannot verbalise. The violence and hatred of the past, 'that other life of father and son' appears to have no place in her world and is equally incomprehensible to her. However, Ruth and Grange individually feed each other emotional sustenance enough to commence the colossal task of being soul survivors in a 'world of perplexity, and…impersonal cruelty' (137). Ruth requires this sustenance and unlimited space 'if she is to fulfil the deepest promptings of her ever-growing self'.[550]

The Continuation of Ruth's Racial Awareness

Whether the impersonal cruelty or violence is rape, as in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, or murder, Alice Walker appears to be less inclined to linger on it in the narrative; Mem's murder is concisely dealt with in less than one paragraph. The importance is not the graphic detailing of a death, but rather the emblematic, emotional and psychological effects that the death may have on others. Of equal importance are the psychological reasons for Brownfield's actions and it is that very 'world of perplexity, and…impersonal cruelty' that Walker depicts throughout her narrative (137). It is consequently interesting

[548] Butler, 'Making a Way Out of No Way', 75.
[549] Hellenbrand, 'Speech, after Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 125.
[550] Butler, 'Making a Way Out of No Way', 73.

to contemplate how black male and female writers treat the symbolic emasculation of black male characters when one compares Walker and *Grange Copeland* with James Baldwin's *Another Country*. Walker presents Grange's reaction to the societal and racial restrictions that are placed upon him in terms of psychological frustration. Unlike Ruth, the reader is aware of how Grange was subjugated as a man whenever in the presence of his white boss. Subsequent violent behaviour toward his family is a culturally constructed representation of black masculinity that Walker has superimposed upon his actions, perpetuated by Grange himself. Interestingly, we do not see that Grange's reactions to his circumstances are ever manifested as fear of a threat to his physical person. He never shows concern that Shipley will have him whipped, or otherwise treated violently. Grange's tension stems from being unable to get his family out of debt and how that reflects upon his economic abilities as a male provider. From a purely personal point of view, Walker remembers with significant resentment the 'shabby houses, the evil greedy men who worked my father to death and almost broke the courage of that strong woman, my mother'[551]; those men who 'paid her sharecropper father three hundred dollars for twelve months of labor'.[552]

Ultimately, Grange blames himself and Brownfield for the dehumanisation they have *allowed* others to impose upon them. As a human being, and especially as a black individual, Grange maintains it was his unique responsibility to hold a part of himself inviolable to the racial pollution that permeated the environment around him. That philosophy may be more exacting than realistic, but it nonetheless shows the distinction to be made between how black female writers such as Walker distinguish subjugation of

[551] Walker, 'The Black Writer and the Southern Experience', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 21.
[552] Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 195.

black males as opposed to how they themselves view it. Walker wants to avoid the blindness created by her awareness of the injustices done to blacks in the South and is able to draw 'a great deal of positive material from [her] underprivileged background'.[553]

For Baldwin, economic and social restrictions on black males are centred upon the actual bodies of the characters, such as Rufus Scott in *Another Country*. The downward spiral of depression and the personal revulsion he is made to feel is not only tied to the blackness of his skin, but to his masculinity. Rufus never reaches the level of introspection that Grange does, for to do so would be to remove himself from victimisation and reaction and to gain control over his life. Consequently, the reactive stages are viewed as more accurately reflective of their conditions within society.[554] Similarly, one could argue that Brownfield's narrative concentrates all that is negative about Southern traditions and customs. He is callously victimised by the extreme racism and poverty of the Georgia rough country in which he is born and raised and as his name clearly suggests, his is a case of blighted development. However, it is Walker's change of narrative direction through Grange and Ruth that infuses this novel with an element of positivity: 'Like the Biblical Ruth she finds herself an alien in a strange land, but, unlike Ruth, she can find her way to a kind of Promised Land, a new space offering fresh possibilities'.[555]

Grange becomes both Ruth's teacher and therapist, instructing her in 'the realities of life' (139), extracting personal material from his extensive experience and his widespread knowledge of black folklore. His retelling of folktales from the black South provides her with a vivid and dynamic awareness of a mythic hero, the trickster 'who

[553] Alice Walker, 'The Black Writer and the Southern Experience', *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 20.
[554] Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, 193-194.
[555] Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 195.

could talk himself out of any situation' (128). As Trudier Harris explains, Walker 'employs folklore for purposes of defining characters and illustrating relationships between them as well as for plot development'.[556] Thus, when Grange treats the Uncle Remus stories with calculated sarcasm, he is challenging and countering stock stereotypes of blackness and demonstrating to Ruth the stupidity of such characterisation. Harris continues to illustrate how Walker ascribes to Grange the 'analytical ability that is often only implied in historical storytellers'.[557] Grange re-interprets a negative black history and imbues it with contemporary political implications that would be immediately understood by Ruth whose social awareness develops steadily. Ruth thus learns a lesson that Brownfield did not, that *verbal* communication, not gratuitous violence, has the power to revolutionise experience by establishing understanding and creating control over life. When listening to Grange sing blues music, she likewise feels 'kin to something very old' (133), a musical tradition arising out of the black South that transforms suffering into a kind of human triumph rooted in what Ralph Ellison described in a review of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* in 1945:

> The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically.[558]

[556] Harris, 'Folklore in the Fiction of Alice Walker: A Perpetuation of Historical and Literary Traditions', 3.
[557] Harris, ibid., 7.
[558] William Edgar, 'Ain't it Hard: Suffering and Hope in the Blues', *Modern Reformation Magazine*, 14 (2005), 31-37 (31).

If, as William Edgar suggests, blues as a form 'brings the "aching consciousness" to the front of the memory in order to transcend it'[559], Walker's use at this juncture is poignant. Regarding the trauma suffered by Ruth, the blues may articulate a 'worldview' but also acts as a personal conquering of individual tragedy.[560] By connecting Ruth to the life-giving tradition of the black folk art of the South, Grange provides her with the time-tested values which will help her to survive. Hellenbrand suggests that 'in his urgent voice and collected tales, Grange plays "mother"…to Ruth'.[561] However, Grange offers far more than this because of his masculine perspective. This is further emphasised with Grange's descriptions of his boyhood that brings to life in Ruth's consciousness 'all sorts of encounters with dead folks and spirits and occasionally the Holy Ghost' (129). As Ruth grows older, Grange also teaches her about the world beyond the South. He steals books from the white library that open her mind and stimulate her imagination. He also reads her episodes from the Bible, especially the story of Exodus, again empowering her with the compelling myth of an oppressed people who triumph over traumatic circumstance through the strength of their will and spirit. Thus, as Hellenbrand accurately argues, 'Grange is a rebellious storyteller, a cultural and historical revisionist… [a] departure from the cultural norms that Ruth learns in school'.[562]

[559] Edgar, ibid.
[560] Edgar, ibid.
[561] Hellenbrand, 'Speech, after Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 126.
[562] Hellenbrand, ibid., 123.

Trauma and the Recovery of Memory

Janice Haaken illustrates how the voices of women of colour relating to trauma survival are few.[563] She further argues that social science and mental health literature has a tendency to decontextualise abuse and trauma, frequently minimising it to psychosomatic and emotional variables. However, black female writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison re-locate private enactments of violence within a 'broader dehumanizing context'.[564] In *Grange Copeland*, Walker depicts the trauma and successful emotional recovery of Ruth amid the harshness of sharecropping life as well as the political turmoil of a burgeoning civil rights movement. Her story of her neglect, trauma and recollection of a destructive experience and immeasurable loss, position this novel within a psychological framework and demonstrate the power of narratively articulating silenced black female voices through the memory of one individual. Intrinsic to both Walker and Morrison is the abuse and neglect of children, Morrison in particular portraying the harrowing rape of Pecola Breedlove by her father Cholly in *The Bluest Eye*.

The terms '*abuse* and *neglect*' have often been considered as interrelated assumptions about child mistreatment. However, 'the incident reports and the criteria for their identification and evaluation are quite different'.[565] Henry Karlson et. al. explain that 'despite such differences, child neglect has not received equal attention in the professional community as a rigorous discipline by itself'.[566] An individualistic view of neglect such as Ruth's or Pecola's, would be illustrated through the theory that the basic

[563] Haaken, 'The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire', 1072.
[564] Haaken, ibid.
[565] Henry C. Karlson et. al., *Theories of Child Abuse and Neglect: Differential Perspectives, Summaries, and Evaluations* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), 189.
[566] Karlson, ibid.

cause of parental neglect is a deficient personality; the parents' neglectful behaviour is seen as the result of a flawed parental personality, as the case of Brownfield, Grange and Cholly Breedlove demonstrates.[567] Velma McBride Murray et. al. similarly argue that an 'overload of contextual stressors overwhelms family members' coping capacities' and that the result is 'compromised psychological functioning'.[568] Walker succinctly portrays such factors; prejudice, poverty and the vicious cycle for parents of the same status that suffer from particular learned character disorders.[569] For Brownfield, this becomes manifest in certain characteristics comprising a powerful belief that his labour is worthless, a deficiency of or significantly inhibited emotional reaction, insincere emotional interactions and severe isolation, and also an inability to properly function in many important areas of his life. Thus Brownfield displays,

> passive-aggressive expression of anger…refusal to commit to positive stands, verbal inaccessibility to others, resulting in a reduced capacity for solving problems due to the non-existence of internal dialogue, and the ability to cause [others] to experience the same feelings of futility. Character flaws prevent… caring for their children…[and] causes these parents to believe that the lives of their children are also somewhat unimportant.[570]

Murray et. al. contend that such issues of futility and worthlessness help 'to make intimate partnerships and parent-child relationships less supportive and more conflicted'.[571]

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[567] Karlson, ibid.
[568] Velma McBride Murray et. al., 'Racial Discrimination as a Moderator of the Links among Stress, Maternal Psychological Functioning, and Family Relationships', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 63 (2001), 915-926 (916).
[569] Karlson, *Theories of Child Abuse and Neglect*, 191.
[570] Karlson, ibid.
[571] McBride Murray, 'Racial Discrimination as a Moderator of the Links among Stress, Maternal Psychological Functioning, and Family Relationships', 916.

However, Ruth demonstrates that it is possible, through Grange's particular curative methods, to gain a greater sense of continuity of being in her life, to feel internally more unified, despite many psychological and external disruptions and traumas. In this sense, Grange acts as a 'protective factor', what Patrick Davies describes as a 'moderator' that reduces 'the association between interparental conflict and child mal-adjustment'.[572] Davies continues to explain how 'the association between interparental conflict and child maladjustment may be substantially reduced when children experience warm parent-child relations'.[573] Through Grange and Ruth, Walker illustrates how it is possible to transform the sense that life is potentially uncontrollable, fragmented and traumatic by changing Ruth's personal narrative, despite the irreversibility of Mem's murder. Ultimately, Walker narratively suggests that Ruth will be a person who has become more able to integrate her experiences into her life. Grange has enabled Ruth to dare to play with ideas and history, and to live with paradox during what have been staggeringly emotional times. He has helped what had the potential to be a massive discontinuity in his grand-daughter's life to feel more like a transition. Grange responds to Ruth's individual strengths, weaknesses and developmental stages, but more importantly, he understands the need to educate her in order to mentally and politically equip her eventual journey into the outside world. Most significantly, Ruth needs to feel the same sense of self and place as Grange eventually does, to become part of a firm foundational heritage of African American identity and sense of belonging. For Grange, despite hating the South 'as much as any place else, where he was born would always be home' (141). Thus Grange instinctively preserves a sense of 'emotional security', a

[572] Patrick T. Davies et. al., 'Child Emotional Security and Interparental Conflict', *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 67 (2002), 1-127 (2).
[573] Davies, et. al., ibid.

hypothesis, according to Davies, that results in 'an important goal that organizes a child's emotional experiences…action tendencies…and appraisals of self and interpersonal relationships'.[574]

In conjunction with what Davies describes as 'attachment theory', the 'emotional security' proposition is a theory that recognises the concept that the child's emotional security can be improved or destabilised by the 'quality of parent-child relations'.[575] Furthermore, a combination of the theories also illustrates that a child's achievement in safeguarding security has enduring 'implications for psychological adjustment'.[576] In this sense, the reader is made aware of Brownfield's issues of jealousy and hatred where Grange is concerned, 'Although he did not love Grange, he was very often depressed by the thought that his father had never really loved him' (164). Grange's 'audacity at taking his daughter' heightens Brownfield's own childhood trauma experiences and issues of neglect. Brownfield may remember Mem teaching him to read and write, making him 'burst into terrible sobs that tore his chest and brought him to the floor…But his tears did not soften him, did not make him analyze his life or his crime' (165). The crying is merely an indication of his present imprisoned situation and leads to an awareness of his loneliness rather than a sense of the necessary introspection of his actions. Brownfield displays a profound fear of such 'deep thinking' believing he will ultimately lose all psychological control and be 'lost'; therefore, he must place the responsibility of his life mistakes on Mem and Margaret (166).

[574] Davies, ibid., 6.
[575] Davies, ibid.
[576] Davies, ibid.

Brownfield illustrates how survivors of trauma also suffer from guilt 'and the defences that such guilt evokes'.[577] He must see himself as righteous and those who perish as deserving of their fate because for the surviving male there is 'a triumphant attitude toward the losses of history'

> The heirs to the Law of the Father…inherit the right to tell the story and to justify the events of history and patriarchal rule itself. The son who submits to a ruthless father may despise him, but he ultimately inherits the father's rights and privileges. He may rebel, but he can lay claim to an alternative kingdom, if only a woman over whom he may rule.[578]

Those women for Brownfield have been his wife, his father's lover and his youngest daughter. Only through their oppression and ultimate submission to his male rule will Brownfield believe that he has somehow socially, emotionally and physically succeeded in life. However, he fails to understand that this would only further create an 'environment of tension, frustration, and oppressive conditions'.[579] Margaret and Mem represent female impotence in the face of such masculine behaviour and as a result initially marked Ruth's entry into a motherless wilderness where the protective side of masculinity appeared illusory. Haaken also describes how in 'Western traditions, women are more likely than men to be transitional icons, facilitating masculine journeys of exploration and conquest'.[580] Margaret, Mem and Josie tend to fulfil this role, as 'wife, mother, daughter, the woman is the one who is left and returned to'; however, Ruth is not

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[577] Janice Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 6.
[578] Haaken, ibid.
[579] Lawrence-Webb, 'African American Intergender Relationships', 627.
[580] Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back*, 1.

'a fixed position in a male universe of transformative action'.[581] Walker chooses to complicate generalised notions of patriarchy and female roles by locating Grange as the central figure of emotional and psychological fortification and Ruth as the one who will eventually leave for her journey of exploration. For as Butler states, Ruth 'must, like most American heroic figures, finally break away from home in order to undertake her own life's journey'.[582]

Physical and Emotional Barriers

As Brownfield emphatically places emotional barriers between himself and others, so Grange similarly and somewhat symbolically fortifies his land from the outside world (176). This sense of a real need of protection 'characterizes the space Grange creates for Ruth'.[583] The radiance of the sun encloses him in an always painfully remembered landscape within which recollections of cotton picking, Margaret, and their unified misery proliferates. Their life reflects the dualities of a harsh reality. The 'choice was either kill her or leave her. In the end he had done both':

> [Grange] marvelled that, knowing him so well, [Ruth] knew nothing of that other life, or even of the dismal birth of her own father. That gray day of retribution in sorrow when the newly born was sentenced to a familiar death. (177)

[581] Haaken, ibid.
[582] Butler, 'Making a Way Out of No Way', 73.
[583] Mason Jr., 'Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*: The Dynamics of Enclosure', 305.

This is a point continually emphasised by this novel, of how the South 'destroys family life' which leads to 'spiritual poverty'.[584] Grange may roll 'up his past…obliterating the keen spots, completely erasing the edges'; however, the reader still maintains a sense that he has at least revised and acknowledged his failings and realised 'what a fool he had been' (178).

The physical barriers around the farm 'keep things in (the growing intimacy between grandfather and granddaughter) and keep things out (the possible interference of the white world)'.[585] So, one day Grange has an idea that they inspect some 'white people' who 'lived on the adjoining property' for Ruth's further education (181). Grange's perception of "colour" is literally black and white, however, interestingly, Ruth observes a myriad of hues and combinations of 'gray and yellow and pink' (181). Grange informs her that all the white folk want is their land, that *all* they do is plot and plan, only leading Ruth to question whether 'anybody ever try to find out if they's real *people*' thus initiating a desire 'to see and hear them face to face' (182). Ruth's racially empowered determination is to meet them not only on her terms but on an equal footing. However, 'white' historically based education will force Ruth to understand the stereotyped treatment of colour, of how society has created a class system of colour consciousness as taught in her school. The narrative implies through Ruth's anger at such negative stereotyping along with Grange's 'education' that she will recover a positive female identity akin to Mem.[586]

Education equally becomes a vehicle through which Ruth remembers happier times with her sisters (187). However, now, school is a barrier to a wider community that snubs

[584] Butler, 'Making a Way Out of No Way', 70.
[585] Mason Jr., 'Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*: The Dynamics of Enclosure', 305.
[586] Hellenbrand, 'Speech, after Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 124.

and teases, ostracises and neglects 'the daughter of a murderer' (189). Memory and trauma are juxtaposed so as to remind the reader and Ruth that her life embodies isolation, fragmentation and a fractured sense of self: 'her mother was dead and her father was in prison. Where exactly…her sisters were remained a mystery' (188). These 'memory gaps' whereby past experiences become confused and even buried means she moves emotionally closer to Grange.[587] Thus, Walker makes Ruth's personal narrative one of '*transformative remembering*', her life an exemplar of 'subversive stories about the female self, stories that diverge from the dominant cultural scripts'.[588]

As Ruth develops into a young woman, thoughts turn to her future, of potential relationships and further landscapes yet undiscovered. Paradoxically, the barriers that have been set firmly in place succeed in making her more determined to 'get away' (193). Butler argues that Ruth 'is able to protect herself with a number of antidotes because she develops a consciousness of Southern life which makes her aware of both its strengths and dangers'.[589] However, despite encouraging Ruth to maintain the farm after he is gone, he is fully aware that even though Ruth wants to 'rise up' if only other black folk were ready, she is not 'ready yet to give' (196). Furthermore, the 'antidotes' that Butler suggests Ruth has at hand have been provided by Grange, it is his love and education that have acted as Ruth's 'protection'.

As Grange and Ruth continue their life together, we discover that Josie 'began living with Brownfield' (203). The surrogate grandmother lives with the father and the grandfather remains the principal parent, so it comes as no surprise that this confused family network 'totally mystified Ruth' (203). A chance meeting with Brownfield and

[587] Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back*, 73.
[588] Haaken, ibid., 107.
[589] Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 198.

Josie highlights these complexities and exacerbates issues all the more when Brownfield 'rubbed the palm of one hand boldly down the front of his pants' (204). Ruth

> was startled and became hysterically baffled, pressing herself into her grandfather's side and trying to walk past without seeing them. For although she had glimpsed her father's profile…she had been able to convince herself that he was not real, that he was at most a shadow from a very painful past and a shadow that could never gain flesh and speak to her. (204)

Ruth's dissociated reaction and deliberation is a 'valid construct' that aids her ability to emotionally distance herself from the trauma she suffered.[590] Walker's use of the 'shadow' simile interconnects pertinent aspects of Brownfield's past and Ruth's future, for as a 'shadow' Brownfield is not only insignificant in her now emotionally flourishing life but also inconsequential to her future. Thus, Ruth's dissociation 'permits movement in and out of walled-off areas of the mind'[591], her natural defence being to imagine her father as fleshless and therefore powerless. However, Brownfield's voice still has the power to horrify his daughter when he sadistically states to Grange, 'I want my goddam daughter!...She don't belong to you. She belong to me and I want her' (204). Grange's reaction is considerably self-reflective and juxtaposes issues of both need and neglect in the narrative as he states how Brownfield made Ruth an orphan, killed her mother, treated her abominably and above all has remained unrepentant. What Grange does realise is his responsibility in these series of events; however, he fails to acknowledge that his return in his son's life was unquestionably too late, the rot had already set in, as Brownfield twice contends: 'You wasn't no daddy to *me!*...and I ain't going to let you keep my child to make up for it' (206). Brownfield reveals his true nature and, according to Christian, 'at

[590] Haaken, *Pillar of Salt: Gender, Memory, and the Perils of Looking Back*, 73.
[591] Haaken, ibid., 74.

his center is the need to be destructive because he feels sorry that he exists at all'.[592] Christian continues to argue that more 'complex than self-hatred, his self-pity verifies his own total involvement with himself while denying him any capacity for regeneration'.[593] Grange correctly pinpoints Brownfield's inability to accept personal blame, and that the opportunity did arise through Mem for Brownfield to reverse the sin of his father. However, racial barriers become paramount within this familial issue of blame and guilt, because positioning culpability on white shoulders renders that section of society more in control over black lives. Grange reminds both his immediate audience along with the reader that 'Nobody's as powerful as we make them out to be. We got our own *souls*, don't we?' (207). Both men are guilty of having slowly descended into a state of emasculation and thus abusing the women in their lives in order to regain some type of physical control. As Hogue concludes, 'in short they reproduce the relation they have with the system in the relations they have in their families'.[594] Brownfield demanding the return of Ruth can therefore be considered as an attempt to regain authority over his father and all Grange can do is to hand Ruth a 'bankbook' and know that he can at least offer her future financial security and therefore independence (212), understanding that such survival was not everything: '*He* had survived. But to survive *whole* was what he wanted for Ruth' (214).

[592] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, 202.
[593] Christian, ibid.
[594] Hogue, 'History, the Feminist Discourse, and Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 57.

Fathers and Daughters – Past and Future Collide

Ruth becomes the narratively empowered female when she happens upon her father. She is surprised by his sobriety and pained expression which initiate confusion in her mind and heart. The surrounding silence mirrors the quiet cotton fields at the beginning of the novel. Ruth's response is cool whilst Brownfield's reaction is to marvel at her similarity to Mem. Their meeting descends into an amalgamation of Brownfield's argumentative tone and Ruth's rightful resentment that he could even hope to plead to some traditional notion of respect she should have for her father. This highlights for Ruth 'the nature of unforgiveness and the finality of a misdeed done. She saw herself as one both with her father and with Grange' (217). All characters coalesce and reflect Butler's point that 'although the narratives, taken in isolation, do not express [Walker's] whole vision of Southern life, together they offer a series of interrelated perspectives' regarding family structure and childhood.[595]

Ruth discovers the fate of her sisters which serves to illustrate the destructive consequences of parental neglect and trauma; Daphne is in a mental institution and Ornette is a prostitute. The two older sisters are emblematic of the Copelands' issues; Ornette reflects the need for human contact, of fatherly love that was lacking and Daphne's position mimics the psychological and internalised trauma of an abusive household. Diane Lye argues that 'adult child-parent relations are largely characterized by reciprocity', this hypothesis proposing that 'parents and children "trade" emotional, practical, and financial support over the life course'.[596] For the Copelands this is not the

[595] Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 196.
[596] Diane N. Lye, 'Adult Child-Parent Relationships', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22 (1996), 79-102 (81).

case; however, Brownfield does reflect Lye's further proposition that 'parents strategically manipulate bequests in order to ensure attention from their children'.[597] Nevertheless, despite Brownfield's coaxing, Ruth's aversion, suspicion and antipathy toward him forces his true characteristics and feelings to be revealed:

> You belong to me, just like my chickens or my hogs…Tell that to your precious grandpa. Tell him he can't keep you; and before I let him I'll see you both in hell! You said you loved me, she said crying. If you love me, *leave me alone!* No…I can't do that. I'm a *man*. (220)

African Americans have been historically made analogous to livestock and property by a dominant white society and Brownfield paradoxically employs such categorisations with his daughter. Furthermore, he demonstrates obvious black male patriarchal attitudes that view female counterparts as 'de mule uh de world' and duly locate them alongside 'chillun and chickens and cows'.[598] Lawrence-Webb et. al. explain how 'the system of patriarchy continues to be one of the most negative influences along with the myths and misperceptions of how African American women and men are presumed to interface'.[599] Brownfield exemplifies an inability to redefine such relationships, whereas Grange positively portrays slowly changing misogynist attitudes. Walker demonstrates through Ruth a developing sense of autonomous female pride, a fitting tribute to a mother who 'had an inner sovereignty, a core of self, which, alas, her husband had not had. She had possessed an embedded strength that Brownfield could not match' (226). In an era of escalating black civil rights, Brownfield is as outdated as his loaded comments; he

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[597] Lye, ibid.
[598] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937; New York: Virago Press, 2004), 29, 110.
[599] Lawrence-Webb, 'African American Intergender Relationships: A Theoretical Exploration of Roles, Patriarchy and Love', 635.

enslaved his own family and blindly disadvantaged them when they required strength. Thus, Grange ultimately differs from his son because being with his grand-daughter, he 'thinks about the world, and Ruth's place in it' (223) and offers 'solutions that do not embrace oppressive patriarchal values'.[600]

As Brownfield illustrates the past in Ruth's life, so her present and future become infused with external worldly issues. The civil rights movement and general racial integration become appealing concepts to a more politically aware Ruth who begins to evolve a sense of ethnic belonging hitherto unknown in her life. Issues regarding the black vote, interracial student marchers and integration become juxtaposed with the news that Brownfield is taking Grange to court. This emotional situation is offset by the soulless white judge, 'a petty person with all the smallness of mind that went with being so' who exchanges jovialities with Brownfield (244). Despite Grange's angry protestations and Ruth's firm refusal to live with her father, the judge awards custody to Brownfield. The ensuing scene means the death of Brownfield by Grange's hand and the combined escape of grandfather and grand-daughter. Grange goes to their cabin in the woods, his gunfire drawing the police in this direction. What becomes apparent with his death is that even though Ruth may now be alone, his nurturing love and racial education survive having given her the courage and impetus to make her own mark on the world. Thus 'Southern injustice erupts in violence which takes Grange's life, yet his death frees Ruth for a new life of expanded possibilities'.[601]

This particular concern with the politics of race and gender is fundamental to the narratives of black female writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Walker's

[600] Lawrence-Webb, ibid., 636.
[601] Butler, 'Alice Walker's Vision of the South in *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*', 200.

principal emphasis is upon the perception of herself as a black female author empowered to recount the narratives of black women who are the past or present initiators of a black female culture. Walker's position is therefore one of assisting black women such as Mem and Margaret, principally those made socially subordinate by race, caste, and class, to have their 'voices heard and their histories read'.[602] Walker further states that this emphasis on the internal and personal world of black individuals has wider political repercussions. During a discussion of the pre-eminence of 'intimate male-female encounters' over social conflicts in the narratives of black women, Walker notes how:

> Twentieth-century black women writers all seem to be much more interested in the black community, in intimate relationships, with the white world as a *backdrop*…There just has not been enough examination or enough application of findings to real problems in our day-to-day living.[603]

The depiction of black communal life and customs in her works, however, are strongly motivated by the belief that 'the truth about any subject only comes when all the sides of the story are put together, and their different meanings make one new one'.[604] Telling the 'truth' involves what Walker identifies as 'writing the missing parts to the other writer's story'.[605] Within black narratives these gaps or omissions are largely signified by what she identifies as general inauthentic representations of black women. Addressing this issue of marginalisation of women, she writes:

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[602] Butler-Evans, *Race, Gender, and Desire*, 13.
[603] Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 181.
[604] Walker, 'Beyond the Peacock', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 49.
[605] Walker, ibid.

> The absence of models in literature as in life, to say nothing of painting, is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect – even if rejected – enrich and enlarge one's view of existence.[606]

As readers we conclude *The Third life of Grange Copeland* with the sincere desire that Ruth has the ability, despite the absence of female role 'models', to grow in both 'spirit' and 'intellect'; that with her grandfather's love, she has achieved that 'survival whole' and will venture into the world with an enriched 'view of existence'. In conclusion, Walker's use of intergenerational childhood experiences, trauma and the psychological recovery of memory are valuable and yet overlooked tools for the literary examination of a text that ultimately illustrates the journey of its female protagonist toward a spiritual 'survival whole'.

[606] Walker, 'Saving the Life That Is Your Own', in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 4.

CHAPTER SIX:

TONI MORRISON (1931 -)

The Bluest Eye.

Trauma and Abuse – The Family Unit and Child Psychology.

Figure 12. 'Childmatters', Spring 2007. Unicef /HQ05 – 1959/ Roger Le Moyne. www.unicef.org.uk

Introduction

In their attempts to construct and narrate an identity, black women writers endeavour to resolve tensions between the politically racial and the black feminist; and to illustrate political impulses alongside the predicament of African American women. Childress succeeds in this with *Wedding Band*, Julia succinctly depicting a blossoming black female consciousness within a prejudiced and segregated early twentieth-century society. Walker achieves such a resolution through the character of Ruth Copeland; her life is the literary catalyst that reflects the stark situation of many African American women in addition to illustrating the burgeoning civil rights movement in the South. In Walker's *Grange Copeland* and Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, the reader is witness to a critical examination of the 'strengths and weaknesses of the institutions of the black family…as well as of the continuing racial and sexual exploitation of black people, especially women'.[607] However, in Morrison's narrative we are confronted not only with nuanced concepts and discourses of ethnicity and gender, but also with the impact of a child's rape of which we are informed at the beginning of the novel.[608] Thus *The Bluest Eye* complicates notions of resolving tensions between two discourses by adding a third component; that of the psychological which incorporates a child's perspective that has the power to transcend colour consciousness. The crux of this chapter is therefore, the child's viewpoint.

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[607] Bernard W. Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 278.
[608] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970; London: Vintage, 1999). Hereafter, page numbers cited in the text.

Barbara Smith argues that writers such as Morrison tell the truth of black childhood experience in manifold ways. They 'bring enlightenment and much needed positive change' when often 'accused of exaggeration and distortion' with regard to 'archetypal female experiences of incest, rape, and battering'.[609]

In an interview with John O'Brien, Alice Walker described how she believed that black writing had suffered, 'because even black critics have assumed that a book that deals with relationships between members of a black family…is less important than one that has white people as a primary protagonist'.[610] In addition, Toni Cade Bambara has noted, the subject of black girlhood 'is not one of the darlings of American literature'.[611] Morrison has explained that the reason she wrote her first novel was due to a sense of loss, a void; 'there were no books about me, I didn't exist in all the literature I had read', thus *The Bluest Eye* textually responds to this absence and lack of representation by imagining 'what it is like to grow up black and female in the 1930s and 1940s'.[612] Jean Strouse describes how Morrison mourned for 'little black girls who were props, background, those people were never center stage' in Western literature.[613] Similarly, Jane Kuenz recognises this lack when she argues that Morrison's 'project is to rewrite the specific bodies and histories of the black Americans whose positive images…have been eradicated by commodity culture'.[614] However, most critics analyse *The Bluest Eye* through a socio-political, economic, racial and textual lens. When psychoanalysis is

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[609] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., 'The Black Person in Art: How Should S/He Be Portrayed?', *Black American Literature Forum*, 21 (1987), 3-24 (4).
[610] O'Brien, *Interviews with Black Writers*, 202.
[611] Ruth Rosenberg, 'Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*', *Black American Forum*, 21 (1987), 435-445 (436).
[612] Jill Matus, 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', in *Toni Morrison: Contemporary World Writers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 37.
[613] Jean Strouse, 'Toni Morrison's Black Magic', *Newsweek*, 30 (1981) 52-57 (54).
[614] Jane Kuenz, '*The Bluest Eye*: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity', *African American Review*, 27 (1993), 421-431 (421).

employed, it is merely in conjunction with such historical and class related issues. Therefore, whilst acknowledging the 'grim social oppression' of 1940s America[615], especially for the African American community, I intend to examine *The Bluest Eye* so as to illustrate that Morrison's portrayal of Pecola Breedlove's rape, trauma and subsequent social isolation may be considered free of any cultural self-absorption, that the main significance is in Morrison's attempt to depict a child's view of the world and subsequent developmental experiences. Morrison clearly identifies the void she saw in literature for individuals such as herself; and thus I argue that Claudia MacTeer's narration is an act of didactic reversal. The child will teach and inform the adult reader, with Morrison 'implicitly' insisting we 'willingly' follow wherever the child will lead.[616]

Definitions of Trauma

Chronicles of traumatised selves introduce a number of questions: What happens to a 'self' once the unimaginable occurs? How does a child survive after being raped by her father? Thus, can narratives of trauma reinstate our faith that the outside world is within reach and that we belong in it? Ruth may be alone at the close of *Grange Copeland*; however, the reader has a sense that she is emotionally equipped for that outside world. We do not feel that the traumatic loss of the childhood element of being carefree has perpetually blighted her efforts. In contrast, Pecola will psychologically fail as a direct result of background and upbringing; she has no positive familial relationships and therefore little sense of an affirming self-awareness or identity. However, Wilfred

[615] Harold Bloom, ed., *Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1999), 1.
[616] Trudier Harris, 'Greeting The New Century with a Different Kind of Magic', *Callaloo*, 19 (1996), 232-238 (232).

Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems argue that the reader should not ignore Pecola's personal accountability for her eventual insanity. They juxtapose Pecola's passivity with Claudia's spirited aggression concluding that even children 'must consider the direction of their lives'.[617] This argument fails to consider the profound implications of sexual abuse and that not only is Pauline Breedlove's dreadful sense of self-esteem imparted to her daughter, but her personal 'impossible dream of blond blue-eyed beauty is passed on as well'.[618] Thus it is difficult to argue that Pecola has any agency in the direction of her young life, because, as Allen Alexander argues, Pauline has divorced herself from 'her family'[619], leaving Pecola little chance of a positive family environment and girlhood. Furthermore, as Pauline judges Pecola 'often by impossible standards', this leads the daughter to feel isolated and feeling she cannot 'measure up' to such criterion.[620]

Laura Brown has argued that the past definitions of trauma need revision so as to take account of the trauma that women and girls experience because of their vulnerability to rape and abuse. Samuels' and Hudson-Weems' approach embodies the definition that trauma is 'defined by its intensity…by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about'[621], and is 'outside of the range of human experience'.[622] However, I argue along with Brown that such definitions prohibit those who suffer experiences that are not beyond the range of human experience that 'we delude ourselves into believing that

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[617] Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Toni Morrison* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1990), 22.
[618] Patrice Cormier-Hamilton, 'Black Naturalism and Toni Morrison: The Journey away from Self-Love in *The Bluest Eye*', *MELUS*, 19 (1994), 109-127 (120).
[619] Allen Alexander, 'The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*', *African American Review*, 32 (1998), 293-303 (296).
[620] Alexander, ibid., 295.
[621] Jean LaPlanche and J. B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1974), 465.
[622] Laura S. Brown, 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychological Trauma', *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed., Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 101.

ordinary life is safe and manageable. But ordinary life is hardly safe for incest victims or for victims of rape'.[623]

As psychologist Judith Lewis Herman observes, a traumatic experience is one in which an individual feels unreservedly *powerless* in the face of what is believed to be an abusive situation or 'life-threatening force'.[624] Thus Pecola's passive reactions to situations of repression must be considered in relation to her age and familial environment. Herman continues to explain how

> repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality. The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe…power in a situation of helplessness.[625]

Pecola fails to adapt because she does not preserve the remnants of her trust, and furthermore, is let down by a community that fails to provide her with safety. For Pecola, the repeated rape by her father forces her developing identity to compensate for the lack of positive parental care and protection with the only 'means at her disposal, an immature system of psychological defences' that dissociate her traumatised 'self' from her mother, former friends and community.[626] Laurie Vickroy rather generally argues that 'traumatized children provide not merely poignant metaphors but also concrete examples of the neglect, exploitation, disempowerment and disavowal of certain communities'.[627] This argument seems a repeated motif whereby the child is always reduced to an

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[623] Matus, 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', 47.
[624] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: the Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 36.
[625] Lewis Herman, ibid., 96.
[626] Lewis Herman, ibid.
[627] Laurie Vickroy, 'The Politics of Abuse: The Traumatized Child in Toni Morrison and Marguerite Duras', *Mosaic*, 29 (1996), 91-105 (91).

exemplar or metaphor; the realities of trauma being overlooked. Morrison's admission at the beginning of the narrative confirms 'she is interested in, not questions of final causes, but questions of process, questions about how process comes to shut down'.[628] This may well encompass the wider perspective of race, class and gender as Vickroy assumes, but also strongly suggests a far more personal and psychological view of specific experiences and *how* they came about.

For the traumatised self, an individual narrative serves both to integrate memories of trauma into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, and the potential to reintegrate the survivor back into his or her community. The residue of trauma is a type of body memory, and whereas traumatic memories feel as though they are passively endured, narratives are a result of certain choices. By engaging in a narrative, the author or survivor takes control over certain aspects of both the story and memory, and thereby can more fully regain a voice and subjectivity. However, it is Claudia with her 'uninhibited responses to the world around her' who takes control by narrating Pecola's personal past.[629] Thus Morrison has the ability to more freely construct a narrative of future liberation for other victims from that particular past. Morrison informs the reader from the outset of the novel of what happens to Pecola, her rape, her father's and baby's death, of her friends' guilt. Thus we begin a narrative of how a society and local community failed a little African American girl, a failure buried in Morrison's depiction of Pecola's and her parents' personal pasts: '*There is really nothing more to say – except why. But since* why *is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in* how' (4).

[628] Shelley Wong, 'Transgression as Poesis in *The Bluest Eye*', *Callaloo*, 13 (1990), 471-481 (471).
[629] Matus, 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', 40.

Both philosophy and story-telling may renew our faith in the world and reassure us that we can feel at home in it, but, as *The Bluest Eye* illustrates, they must also give voice to the profound dislocations that continually rupture this reassurance. Morrison specifically chooses the collective voice of children, particularly 'the frankness and perception' of Claudia[630], in order to tell the 'story of female violation revealed from the vantage point of the victims or could-be victims of rape – the persons no one inquired of…the girls themselves' (170). As Morrison stated, her text is the 'kind of book [she] had never read before'; her interest lay in the possibility that 'in 1964 when [she] started writing *The Bluest Eye*…such a book' did not exist.[631] Hence Morrison appears to call for narratives that relate directly to the young black reader. Susan Brison and other feminist philosophers illustrate that personal narratives do effectively anchor reflection in concrete experiences, with profound implications for philosophical theories. Brison argues that such narratives:

> can expose the gender and other biases inherent in, among other things, much traditional moral, legal and political philosophy. They can serve to bear witness, bringing professional attention to the injustices suffered by previously neglected or discounted groups.[632]

Brison's argument works well when one considers that Claudia bears witness to Pecola's trauma, and this particular perspective brings attention to a neglected group, namely, poor black children. However, Morrison's narrative resists the impulse to master the unmasterable; she illustrates how the self that is split retains the sense of contingency and

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[630] Matus, ibid.
[631] Roseann P. Bell et. al. eds., *Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature*, ed., (New York: Anchor Books, 1979), 254.
[632] Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 24.

strangeness in the world, which makes impossible a physical or psychological return to certainty and familiarity. Pecola, at the novel's conclusion appears to be eternally lost and alienated in the imaginary realm of her traumatised mind; she is a misplaced soul. As Brison observes, 'the right sort of interactions with others can be seen as essential to autonomy' and personal development[633], but this is precisely what Morrison points out as lacking in Pecola's life.

Developmental psychology has made substantial progress in recent years.[634] The child is now being recognised as an active agent in complicated interactions with a multifaceted social and physical environment. However, underneath this more modern outlook, traditional assumptions still remain. Society retains the conviction that causes of development are due either to the structure of genes or to the structure of environment, the ancient 'nature versus nurture' dichotomy. This and related assumptions have massive implications for theories of development. I will show how Morrison distorts such theories and challenges an ecological, social and racial perspective because this requires that Pecola, Frieda and Claudia and their environment form single systems, not dichotomies. These children and their differing stages of development offer a means of showing how two exclusive forms of cause, nature and nurture, could manage to combine.

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[633] Susan J. Brison, 'Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory, and Personal Identity', in *Feminists Rethink the Self*, ed., Diana Tietjens Meyers (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 28.

[634] Keith Richardson, *Developmental Psychology: How Nature and Nurture Interact* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000).

'Here is the House'

Morrison immediately plunges the reader into a classic mid-century stereotype of a perfect, happy white family home that neatly contains two parents, a boy and a girl. They live in an idyllic house: 'it is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty' with a kitten, dog and friend as subsidiary factors (1). These characters act as the seeming given of contemporary life, the iconic 'Dick and Jane' who stand 'as the only visible model for happiness and thus implicitly accuses those whose lives do not match up'.[635] The nursery-rhyme mantra begins in an ordinary way, until suddenly, the repeated text loses all punctuation and the line spacing becomes narrower. Thus the previously regular rhythm develops into an erratic rush as the mother seems to hysterically keep on laughing with the father manically smiling; meanwhile the insistent words demand that the little girl *will* play. The final repetition descends into a frenzied jumble of words all forced into as small a space as possible. The tighter text suggests enclosure and pressure, the figurative weight of the words representing the literal burden of life on the individual who cannot comply with this unrelenting refrain of perfection. With this repetition in the reader's mind, Morrison then locates the ensuing narrative in the form of a prologue that tells us of Pecola's fate. In an interview, Morrison commented that she had 'used the primer, with its picture of a happy family, as a frame acknowledging the outer civilization. The primer with white children was the way life was presented to black people'.[636] Furthermore, Jane Kuenz importantly states that 'Dick and Jane' books and images were 'a ubiquitous, mass produced presence in schools across the country. Its widespread use

[635] Kuenz, '*The Bluest Eye*: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity', 422.
[636] Thomas LeClair, 'The Language Must Not Sweat', *New Republic*, 184 (1981), 25-29 (28-29).

made learning' such a 'commodified life dangerously synonymous with learning itself'.[637]

The ironic binary of the home and school environment is illustrated through what Phyllis Klotman describes as 'the ingenious structure of the novel. The 'Dick and Jane' referent effectively introduces the fictional milieu of Morrison's characters'.[638] Thus the reader is immersed in a day in the life of Frieda and Claudia MacTeer. The initial tone is one of childlike aggression that is directed toward another girl whose 'taunts…suggest a familiar world of childish power struggles and retributions that seems to depend more at this point in the narrative on class and wealth than on race'.[639] Immediately we are thrown into *their* world, with their seemingly insignificant hopes and desires. This is swiftly followed by a description of the family home that by no means represents that of the nursery-rhyme: 'Our house is old, cold, and green. At night a kerosene lamp lights one large room. The others in darkness, peopled by roaches and mice' (5). The girls' reality is one of distinct division. They go to school whilst the adults talk in exhausted edgy voices of work. Parents do not 'talk' to them; rather, they give instructions and orders with no explanation. Thus, as Rosenberg argues, 'the children are forced to rely on each other…since adults make themselves so inaccessible'.[640] In short, the children appear to be more burdensome than of value with Claudia's mother seemingly showing little sympathy when her daughter is ill: 'My mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness' (7). Claudia's later introspection about this moment is interestingly followed by

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[637] Kuenz, '*The Bluest Eye*: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity', 422.
[638] Phyllis R. Klotman, 'Dick and Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye*', *Black American Literary Forum*, 13 (1979), 123-125 (123).
[639] Matus, 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', 40-41.
[640] Rosenberg, 'Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*', 437.

her questions: 'But was it really like that? As painful as I remember? Only mildly' (7). Morrison thus questions our memory of past instances. Is it possible that what happens to the child is relatively more agonising and severe because of his or her inability to re-evaluate in an adult way? For Claudia it is individual sensory moments, instances and images that Morrison has created in order to succinctly portray the child's view. It is the act of vomiting, the taste of revolting medicine, the feel of a quilt, the sound of feet nearing the bed and the touch of a hand that encapsulate the sensation and atmosphere of this scene. Rosenberg contends that 'parents express their concern through the strict annihilation of any vestige of impropriety, through lashing out…[therefore] an act of translation is required to read the love latent in it'.[641] In an interview with Robert Stepto, Morrison confirms this need to reread past events, that with regard to the MacTeer parents, the older Claudia understands that deep down, 'they cared' for their children.[642]

With regard to Claudia's development, she would be described by child psychologists as being intellectually in the 'concrete-logical' stage, whereby illness is believed to arise through contamination by bodily contact with the sickness, more elaborately, by 'swallowing or inhaling it'.[643] Younger children classically believe that sickness is the consequence of human action and hence the reason for the younger Claudia feeling that her mother's anger is firmly directed at her. Another interesting psychological finding is that children of Claudia's age fail to differentiate between illnesses. So a cold or scraped knee would both be blamed on contagion or immanent

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[641] Rosenberg, ibid.
[642] Robert B. Stepto, *Chant of Saints: A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship*, eds., Michael S. Harper and Robert B. Stepto (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 214.
[643] Sara Meadows, *The Child as Thinker: The Development and Acquisition of Cognition in Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1993), 122.

justice.[644] In Claudia's case this is not particularly surprising, as she comments on how parental invocations ultimately accuse the children of being 'crazy' if they 'cut or bruise' themselves, and 'shake their heads in disgust at [their] lack of consideration' when they catch a cold (5-6). Additionally, terms of maternal endearment or worry 'are seldom verbalized in *The Bluest Eye*; rather, they are beaten into the child'.[645]

For Frieda and Claudia, and many African American children in similar narratives, the concept of house and home is manifold. Not only does the core family live in the main abode, but often lodgers form part of the wider scene and for Claudia this is in the shape of Mr Henry. Morrison portrays concepts of belonging within an urban African American community through black female voices that represent the sounds, lives and often unrealised aspirations of so many individuals. Young daughters listen silently to their mothers, learning and understanding the world through their adult eyes; however, the daughters remain emotionally distant from mothers who have known adversity enough to have hardened their perceptions of this new, and for them, seemingly self-indulgent post-war generation. The 'thrust of their emotions' is clear to Frieda and Claudia, despite not knowing the 'meanings of their words' (10).

The arrival of Mr Henry is swiftly followed by Pecola, a county 'case', whose immediate welfare is placed firmly with the girls. The local community can sympathise with families who have been evicted for economic reasons, yet Cholly Breedlove has shown his heartlessness in purposefully making his family homeless. Not only does Pecola's father violate her trust and her body, but her mother fails to supply her daughter with the correct emotional tools to survive because she has none to offer. As Brownfield

[644] Meadows, ibid.
[645] Rosenberg, 'Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*', 438.

perpetuated the sins of his father, so Pauline Breedlove propagates her personal issues of isolation and distorted sense of beauty through her daughter. As Patrice Cormier-Hamilton contends, 'it is difficult to fault a young girl for' her mother's misperception of beauty; 'certainly both white and black communities in her world seem to support the idea'.[646] However, as Klotman argues, 'only Claudia, of the three girls, rejects these fraudulent images' of 'Dick and Jane' and Shirley Temple.[647] Hence Morrison offers a text to her potential black female readers that fills the gap she had felt.

White Baby Dolls [648]

(Figure 13. Shirley temple dolls)

When Pecola moves in with the MacTeers, Frieda and Claudia attempt to make her feel welcome, bringing her food and 'some milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup' (12). Frieda and Pecola agree on 'how cu-ute Shirley Temple was', however, Claudia 'hated…old squint-eyed Shirley' (13). The issue is one of desired representation, namely, one of white pre-pubescent perfection that is outwardly admired by the two black elder

[646] Cormier-Hamilton, 'Black Naturalism and Toni Morrison: The Journey Away from Self-Love in *The Bluest Eye*', 115.
[647] Klotman, 'Dick and Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye*', 124.
[648] 'Loretta's Shirley Temple Dolls: A Shirley Temple doll reference site for collectors'. <http://www.allmydolls.com/> Copyright 2000-2003. Permission granted. [accessed: 25/03/2008].

girls, but inwardly detested by Claudia; the ostensible white flawlessness is the most galling to the youngest black child. Klotman argues that Morrison draws a distinction between Pecola and Shirley Temple just as she does between the black families and 'Dick and Jane' so as to 'underscore the irony of black experience'.[649] The dichotomy between white culture and black childhood experience that Morrison sets up continually accentuates 'the issue of growth and development' that 'points to the commonality of human experience'.[650] However, Claudia is the exception, and for her the worst recollection is of receiving 'a big, blue-eyed Baby Doll' for Christmas that the 'adults' believed was her 'fondest wish' (13). Claudia has no idea what to do with the doll as she has no ethnic or emotional connection with the unresisting, cold white limbs that fail to reflect her own black corporeality. Her parents believe Claudia should want the Christmas doll, but Claudia dreams of something much less expensive, the 'experience' of listening to her father 'play his violin for [her] alone' in 'the security and warmth' of her mother's kitchen; sensory images that invoke complete familial harmony (15). Thus Claudia 'destroyed white baby dolls', her hatred duly transferred 'to little white girls' (15). Claudia does not learn 'acceptability from the formal symbols, educational experience or from cultural symbols' which leads to 'self-hatred'.[651]

Playing 'mother' to these white dolls is thus judged by Claudia as a remote experience, and more essentially, not necessarily positive. The mothering that Claudia has received can therefore be taken into consideration because the growth of such social and emotional understanding stems from the 'child's interest in and responsiveness to the

[649] Klotman, 'Dick and Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye*', 124.
[650] Klotman, ibid., 125.
[651] Klotman, ibid.

behaviour and feelings of others'.[652] We have been privy to Claudia's desire for familial contentment and the stark contrast of this to her daily life. From a child psychologist's standpoint, subsequent development of Claudia's social understanding will be formed by the intensity of her self-concern in the context of family relationships and also by her participation in the moral discourse of the family. As the black adults 'Awwwww' over pretty little white girls (15), as they continue to buy white baby dolls, Claudia is required to 'learn' to adjust her attitudes. This is in order to be consistent with the majority of black and white notions of female beauty in the 1940s, Shirley Temple and Jane Withers being the two young exemplars Morrison uses of the era (13). Thus, against such 'a contemporary mood wherein, as Morrison notes, 'everybody is trying to be "right"'[653], *The Bluest Eye* 'launches a critique of received norms of beauty and morality'.[654] It must also be argued that this critique is specifically through a child's perspective, one that differentiates this novel from other 'fictional representations of little black girls' because of Claudia's 'radical repudiation of 'colorism''.[655]

The black experience, concepts of female beauty in conjunction with issues of motherhood and mid-twentieth-century representations of the perfect nuclear family, are subverted and destabalised in the narrative through the characters of Pauline Breedlove, Pecola and the three prostitutes that live above them. According to Shirley Hill,

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[652] Meadows, *The Child as Thinker*, 139.
[653] LeClair, 'The Language Must Not Sweat', 27.
[654] Wong, 'Transgression as Poesis in *The Bluest Eye*', 473.
[655] Rosenberg, 'Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*', 439.

> Poor women of color…have few sources of hope or fulfilment in their lives, but the oppression they experience…does not deprive them of…procreative abilities… [which] are profoundly powerful…motherhood is a…marker of womanhood… a respectable social identity…a sense of control, and self-expression.[656]

However, as true as this statement may be for some, there are many examples in African American female literature that offer an alternative view. In Ann Petry's *The Street*, the black female protagonist and single mother, Lutie, is gradually ground down in social terms and obtains no assistance from her black community. Ann Petry's *The Narrows* portrays a black mother with little interest in her children, Mamie leaving the parenting to her cuckolded husband. Alice Childress's *Wedding Band* illustrates motherhood as more of a burden since the children are often left to fend for themselves and its main female protagonist is childless. Alice Walker's *Grange Copeland* depicts the possible positive aspect of mothering through Mem; however, her murder halts the scope of maternal involvement and Grange takes on the role of parent. Kristin Hunter's *God Bless the Child* similarly tells the story of Rosie Fleming, a young black girl forced to find her own way through life with little apparent support from her single mother 'Queenie'.[657]

Thus, 'a respectable social identity…a sense of control', fails to sustain or materialise in the lives of these fictitious mothers and daughters; however, the motherless prostitutes in *The Bluest Eye* formulate a far superior sense of control and self-expression as, albeit unrespectable, women. Their hatred of men in general and the mutual affection between Pecola and Marie may not have 'much effect on either their own standing in the

[656] Shirley A. Hill, 'In Search of the Village: Black Motherhood in Transition', in *Black Intimacies: A Gender Perspectives on Families and Relationships* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005)120.
[657] Kristin Hunter, *God Bless the Child* (1964; London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1965).

community or Pecola's life'.[658] However, their textual inclusion emphasises the relation between 'social power and individual psychology' and how these characters try 'to give voice to those who are traumatized' or made peripheral 'by oppressive social and familial forces'.[659] Hill acknowledges that stereotypical 'marker[s] of womanhood' are 'inherently politically risky'; however, this appears to be with regard to a white patriarchal minimising of black women's 'valiant fight for reproductive rights, and the perils of motherhood'.[660] The black children, and black women who choose not to procreate, involved in these struggles seem to be invisible, the 'mother' being the predominant focus of Hill's academic analysis. Patricia Collins does refer to 'the work of raising children', but it is with regard to motherhood as a 'site where black women express and learn the power of self-direction…and a belief in Black women's empowerment'.[661]

As domesticity became the common work-place environment for many black women, so did the raising of employers' white children. Mem in *Grange Copeland*, Mattie in *Wedding Band*, Lourinda in *God Bless the Child* and Pauline Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* all work for white families. However, this aspect of their lives creates complicated issues of 'mothering' and economic necessity. Claudia's mother may take Pecola into the family home; however, she soon makes it very clear as to her feelings toward a believed intrusion through less than subtle comments regarding Pecola. Thus Morrison further contests the black motherhood ethos by offering an antithesis to essentialist views of black women as inherently equipped with child-rearing skills. For all

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[658] Kuenz, '*The Bluest Eye*: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity', 428.
[659] Vickroy, 'The Politics of Abuse: The Traumatized Child in Toni Morrison and Marguerite Duras',91.
[660] Hill, 'In Search of the Village: Black Motherhood in Transition', in *Black Intimacies*, 121.
[661] Patricia H. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 118.

the women mentioned, the appearance of nurturing a child that is not their own takes on an outward appearance of respectability and individual sacrifice. However, the reality is often one of resentment, of feeling exploited, of private 'fussing soliloquies' that 'heaped' insults onto those children concerned (16). These emotions are often portrayed through the female conversations that take place; Childress, Hunter and Morrison continually employ such vocal spaces for their black female characters.

Ugliness, Misfits and Personal Stories

Bernard Bell contends that *The Bluest Eye* is a novel 'about growing up poor, black, and female in a male-dominated, white middle-class society'.[662] Furthermore, Ann Gebhard suggests that Morrison's narrative challenges previous fiction relating to young adults that for 'the last two decades' has been 'a taboo-constrained, white upper-middle-class enclave'.[663] Morrison duly proffers the Breedlove family as an exemplar of 'poor and black', yet she combines the political and the psychological by highlighting that they remained in their squalid home because 'they believed they were ugly' (28). Ugliness becomes a multifarious concept that incorporates the literal, socio-cultural, aesthetic and familial. This family of four wore its mantle of ugliness 'although it did not belong to them…it came from conviction, their conviction' (28). Ugliness permeates the family's behaviour, with Pecola in particular attuned to past parental antagonisms, such physical fights mirroring those of Grange and Margaret, Brownfield and Mem. Cholly Breedlove's anger and contempt stems from a semi-remembered episode when two white

[662] Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, 272
[663] Ann O. Gebhard, 'The Emerging Self: Young-Adult and Classic Novels of the Black Experience', *The English Journal*, 82 (1993), 50-54 (50).

men caught him having sex with a young black girl. Their racial taunts effectively emasculated him leaving Cholly to despise the girl and not them. This past humiliation effectively moulds the older Cholly and how he rationalises his reality.

Remembering of some sort is essential for practically any human cognitive activity. Whatever stimulus or whatever crisis we encounter, we are liable to deal with it using some comparison with situations met earlier in our experience. Generally, most cognition, perhaps all, necessitates some type of memory. Conversely, the application of memory is seldom an isolated intellectual skill of unadulterated recollection. It is influenced by people's language proficiency, perception, opinions and assumptions in addition to cultural manipulation.[664] Consequently, as a result of an intricate sexually, racially degrading experience, Cholly's attitudes toward love, sex, hate and physical aggression become indistinguishable, the children becoming constant witnesses to their parents' incessant and ugly battle of wills. Sammy Breedlove manages to escape the squalor of both family and home, whereas his sister must endure and pray, 'Please, God…Please make me disappear' (33). Her desire to become invisible intensifies, however, 'try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear' (33). Pecola's eyes symbolise all that she has been forced to witness, and they are the entrance to the pain imprinted on her psyche and they represent the collective memories and thoughts of a child who believes *she* is responsible for her 'ugliness' and stultifying situation: 'if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say beautiful, she herself would be different' (34).

Thus it becomes understandable how painful it is 'for little black girls', such as Pecola, 'to grow into healthy womanhood with a positive self-image' when the general

[664] Meadows, *The Child as Thinker*, 49.

desire was for blue eyes and yellow hair.[665] Rosenberg argues that it is this issue that 'the novel explores – a world that permits the foreclosure of childhood'.[666] This is certainly true, but must also incorporate the concept of *intergenerational transmission*, a term that explains how cultural prescriptions are unquestioningly handed down from generation to generation as models for what should be considered as 'normal'.[667] Roy Herrenkohl furthers this concept of intergenerational transmission by asking, 'Is the potential for being abusive passed from generation to generation?'.[668] Herrenkohl does argue that evidence 'suggests that some parents who are abused as children become abusive as parents', but states that this is not true in all cases.[669] Regarding Cholly, his 'abuse' was purely racial; there may be evidence of parental neglect, yet his Aunt Jimmy added much needed security to his life, a point often disregarded by many critics.[670] With Pauline, intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge among mothers and daughters cannot be considered despite the mother having been traditionally seen as the '"first cause" of gender and the cultural transmitter…throughout childhood'.[671] Therefore, Pauline subverts the reasoning that the mother's role is crucial in the socialisation process especially where daughters are concerned.

Pauline's inability to positively 'educate' her daughter can be interpreted through Pecola's continual desire for *blue* eyes which Morrison narratively reinforces with a

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[665] Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, 273.
[666] Rosenberg, 'Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*', 442.
[667] Helma Lutz, 'The Legacy of Migration: Immigrant Mothers and Daughters and the Process of Intergenerational Transmission', in *Caribbean Migration: Globalised Identities*, ed., Mary Chamberlain (New York: Routledge, 1998), 96.
[668] Roy C. Herrenkohl, 'Intergenerational Transmission', in *Children At Risk: An Evaluation of Factors Contributing to Child Abuse and Neglect*, eds., Robert T. Ammerman and Michel Hersen (New York: Plenum Press, 1990), 101.
[669] Herrenkohl, ibid.
[670] Vickroy, Wong, Samuels and Hudson-Weems, Cormier-Hamilton.
[671] Nancy M. Theriot, *The Biosocial Construction of Femininity: Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), 11.

perception of time (Pecola's fervent prayers 'for blue eyes' lasting 'for a year' (35)). This stems from Pauline's 'adoption' of white society's 'belief system' that 'leads her to leave behind those persons, including her family members, whom she feels fail to measure up to her standards'.[672] Furthermore, Klotman suggests, as a domestic worker for a white family, Pauline sees 'her own daughter through the acquired astigmatism of the Fisher's world'; therefore, 'Pecola learns that she is ugly, unacceptable, and especially unloved'.[673] However, Morrison juxtaposes this familial lack with peripheral characters with whom Pecola feels more at home – the three prostitutes that live above the Breedloves. Miss Marie, Miss China and Miss Poland do not fit into classic stereotypes of the fictional prostitute, their banter and vocal space additionally subverting traditional notions of femininity and womanhood. These women are not 'luckless', 'generous' hearted, humble or 'inadequate whores'; rather these women 'hated men, all men, without shame, apology, or discrimination' (42-43). If, as Kuenz contends, white socio-cultural standards do 'not allow alternate images' thus making 'standards of beauty and femininity for white women…unattainable' for black women'[674], then the prostitutes 'offer a counterpoint'.[675] Alexander argues that they also act as an alternative to Pauline,

> showing Pecola that their lives, no matter how much they are despised by others, have meaning because the women define themselves rather than relying on the judgments of others.[676]

[672] Alexander, 'The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*', 295.
[673] Klotman, 'Dick and Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye*', 124.
[674] Kuenz, '*The Bluest Eye*: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity', 424.
[675] Alexander, 'The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*', 301.
[676] Alexander, ibid.

Moreover, Alexander contends that Claudia's parents, 'much like the prostitutes…seem largely unconcerned with fulfilling any roles prescribed by outside influences'.[677] However, this argument fails to acknowledge the MacTeers' *blood* bond, that in comparison with the prostitutes, they may 'place more value on action than image…and…are socially grounded in reality'.[678] In contrast, the prostitutes will never be able to save Pecola from her father because the depth of familial relations is absent. Unlike the three 'merry gargoyles' (42) with their knowledge that 'the physical is a realm to be embraced rather than shunned'[679], Pecola has little life experience to realise that blue eyes will change nothing with regard to her depressing existence other than to make her a further peripheral character and social misfit. Thus, ironically, despite their fondness for Pecola, the prostitutes equally fail to transmit information that could imbue Pecola with a sense of positive identity.

Morrison, follows this section of the narrative by introducing the reader to Maureen Peal, a green-eyed 'high-yellow dream child with long brown hair' (47). Claudia compares this new arrival with the local 'rich' white girls purely on the basis of appearance and dress, the other children intrinsically accepting the difference: 'Black boys didn't trip her…white boys didn't stone her…black girls stepped aside' and the white girls graciously accepted her presence (48). Interestingly, traditional notions of the mulatta have tended toward social isolation because 'she' does not neatly fit into a specific colour-coded category. Although socio-cultural assumptions tend to consider

[677] Alexander, ibid.
[678] Alexander, ibid.
[679] Alexander, ibid.

'light-skinned Black women…more feminine and beautiful'[680], the historical realities were disenfranchisement after the Civil War and a self-segregation to preserve the status of the mulatto elite. This process meant that the elite actively 'discriminated against their darker-skinned brethren'.[681] Thus, Morrison again suspends and subverts conventional notions of colour prejudice by locating Maureen within a community of many shades of black and brown, and furthermore, within the communal realm of children. The interaction of Claudia, Frieda, Pecola and Maureen descends into a racial issue of blackness, as an isolated Maureen screams at them 'I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am *cute*!' (56). Claudia's young mind comprehends this outburst:

> We were sinking under the wisdom, accuracy, and relevance of Maureen's last words. If she was cute – and if anything could be believed, she *was* – then we were not. And what did that mean? We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser…What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what? (57)

Kuenz regards this episode as a learning curve whereby the sisters come to understand 'the *fact* of their own lack, variously identified as ugliness or "unworthiness"'.[682] However, Kuenz fails to acknowledge Claudia's question, 'And so what?' (57). This is a typical response whereby youth protects the MacTeer sisters from further uncomfortable implications of such insults. Their disdain for Maureen stems from childish material envy, not necessarily a desire to be the same colour. For Frieda and Claudia, their sibling solidarity is one form of protection from girls such as Maureen. Therefore, in their rejection of Maureen, the sisters echo Alice Walker's insistence that 'Colorism…is a

[680] Kathy Russell, et. al., 'Epilogue', in *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), 166.
[681] Russell, et. al., 'The Color Gap in Power and Privilege', in *The Color Complex*, 24.
[682] Kuenz, '*The Bluest Eye*: Notes on History, Community, and Black Female Subjectivity', 423.

form of self-hatred in celebrations over 'the birth of a "golden" child' rather than the joyful acceptance of 'our "rusty black" joy'.[683]

Nature versus Nurture

Spring arrives with the promise of a fresh new start, but Morrison peels away the façade of 'decent' society seen through the story of Geraldine, in order to reveal the often sordid realities of life. The MacTeers' new lodger molests Frieda leading to the father beating him and attempting to shoot him (76-77). Initially, this seems a poignant moment of parental concern and protection, but Morrison underscores this with what we already know has happened to Pecola. The tension in such oppositions highlights the diversity in parenting abilities and childhood experiences. Ironically, Claudia feels an element of jealousy rather than sympathy, stating how she gets 'tired of having everything last' (77). We are immediately repositioned into a child's view of events, of how external factors need to be integrated and associated with pre-assessed information.[684] Claudia does not directly understand how Frieda feels because she has not experienced the same event; thus she needs to somehow relate it back to herself in order to measure this new information. This in turn introduces another area of missing information, the facts of life. Frieda is crying because a neighbour suggested she could be 'ruined' (78).

The girls' search for Pecola and information regarding possible ruination takes them to Mrs. Breedlove's place of work near a segregated park full of 'clean, white, well-behaved children and parents' (81-82). This vision of sanitised decency is further

[683] Walker, 'If the Present Looks Like the Past', *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 311.
[684] Meadows, *The Child as Thinker*, 219.

embellished by the white house of the Fisher family. The arrival of the sisters brings Mrs Breedlove and a little white girl onto the scene, the child fearful of being confronted by three shabby black girls. Her calling Pauline 'Polly' simultaneously raises the issue of maternal identity, of how Pecola calls her mother *Mrs.* Breedlove. Visions of black female domestics such as Lutie in *The Street*, Lourinda in *God Bless the Child* and Mildred in Alice Childress's *Like One of the Family* (1956) abound. The white expectations are that the black female domestics will 'love' and 'adore' their white charges, yet for Childress's character Mildred the opposite is true.[685] Pauline is the antithesis to Mildred in that she appears to care more for the little white girl, an accident causing 'Polly' to harshly dismiss Pecola. Sadly, one assumes in this case that the reaction of the mother is not from economic necessity but rather from preference.

As the park and lake appear as a dream vision for the young girls, then for Pauline Breedlove, this white house and white child are the closest things to decency of which she can pretend that she is a part and the furthest from her black family and filthy house that she so bitterly despises. Consequently, in one comment, she denies her daughter, her home and family as well as the fact that she will always be submissive to the little white girl. As Alexander proposes, 'Pauline molds her lifestyle to correspond to what the dominant culture applauds'[686]; thus she 'divorces herself from her African American heritage'.[687] It must also be added that Pauline divorces herself from her immediate family and community. In this sense Vickroy is correct in her argument that this novel 'explores how the traumatic experience of social powerlessness and devalued racial

[685] Alice Childress, *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life* (1956; Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 2.
[686] Alexander, 'The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*', 298.
[687] Alexander, ibid., 296.

identity prevents the African American community from joining together'.[688] However, I argue that Pecola cannot be purely used as emblematic of the need to find 'ways to oppose dominant forces'.[689] It must be considered that Morrison more specifically intended to tell the tale of black childhood experiences, of 'who survived under what circumstances and why'.[690] After all, as a young black reader, Morrison felt 'shunted to the sidelines' and as an adult writer has the ability to rectify such matters.[691]

The story of Pauline Breedlove's early days directly follows the kitchen incident, allowing Morrison to allocate an element of justification to the character's adult and parental behaviour. This may flesh out the individual characters, however, Morrison, in these snapshots of past lives, allows poignant issues to seep through. By way of Pauline's character we begin to see how a sense of familial and parental isolation can certainly influence her abilities as a mother later in the narrative. As this is her 'story', Morrison allows Pauline to narrate her own tale by inserting her 'words' into the text; this personalises and gives an element of an intimate diary form to the novel. What becomes apparent is how Pauline's childhood isolation becomes metamorphosed into an adult alternative whereby black sisterhood or kinship is severely lacking when the married Pauline and Cholly move to the city. Pauline will eventually find solace in the church and a white family home; however, any lessons learned will not be passed down to her daughter. What does become transmitted is a yearning for 'physical beauty' as a result of watching the 'movies' (95). Thus, films 'educate' Pauline in how to assign and scale categories of beauty, so unsurprisingly, even after the physical and emotional experience

[688] Vickroy, 'The Politics of Abuse: The Traumatized Child in Toni Morrison and Marguerite Duras', 92.
[689] Vickroy, ibid.
[690] LeClair, 'The Language Must Not Sweat', 26.
[691] Rosenberg, 'Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*', 436

of giving birth, when Pecola is handed to her, Pauline knew '*she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly*' (98). As Christian asserts, 'the die is cast. Pecola, her own child, is assigned a bottom category in the scale of absolute beauty'.[692] Appearance, dependence and reassurance now play significant roles in her life and in attempting to teach her children 'Fisher' respectability: 'she taught them fear: fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God' (100). If the sin of the father is repeated, such as through Grange and Brownfield, then the sin of the mother is paradoxically to nurture low self-esteem and minimal self-belief. This is what Pauline instils in her daughter, Pecola, who because 'the possession of beauty is equated with self-worth…will learn to be separate and unworthy'.[693]

There are two critical features to the model of nature versus nurture and primarily, the two types of causes of development are mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Psychologist Keith Richardson explains that traditional views argue that 'change is due *either* to innate, internal, genetic, biological factors, or to learned external, environmental ones and between them all possible forms of change is accounted for'; they form a dichotomy, namely, 'nature versus nurture'.[694] Furthermore, such a theory would contend that the structure shaping the changes is complete, fully formed, either in the 'blueprint' in the genes that becomes played out during development or in the present composition 'of the environment which becomes internalized through learning'.[695] Within this process of understanding, information is intellectually reorganised 'either as the expression of the

[692] Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 146.
[693] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, ibid.
[694] Richardson, *Developmental Psychology: How Nature and Nurture Interact*, 1-2.
[695] Richardson, ibid., 2.

internal genetic code or as internal representations, "copies" of the external world'.[696] This suggests little room for psychological manoeuvre; therefore, considering one main focus of Morrison's narrative is the rape of Pecola by her father, it is imperative to understand Cholly's childhood environment and whether this enables us to further comprehend his actions.

The first apparent psychological issue in young Cholly's life is one of parental abandonment, and so he is brought up by the ageing Great Aunt Jimmy. Neither of Cholly's parents appear at any early stage of his development, yet he does have a positive male role model in his life – a drayman called Blue. Cholly 'loved Blue. Long after he was a man, he remembered the good times they had had' (104). The narrative tone and imagined environment is one of communal tradition and sharing, albeit a working class and often harsh existence. Cholly's home life is securely maintained by his Great Aunt, and he is thus surrounded by a positive female-centred and spiritual atmosphere. Cholly's developmental environment certainly does not suggest either emotional or physical deprivation. The women who surround him may be aging, however, they are 'free' from black and white male domination, Cholly contentedly listening to their chattering, depicted as 'a purée of tragedy and humor, wickedness and serenity, truth and fantasy' (108-109). Thus, when one considers the evidence supplied by Morrison, it is difficult to comprehend that Cholly's later 'despair', due to his 'inability to ground himself in new measures' results from his early years.[697] As Richardson argues, 'a host of factors can influence any given developmental outcome'.[698]

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[696] Richardson, ibid.
[697] Wong, 'Transgression as Poesis in *The Bluest Eye*', 476.
[698] Richardson, *Developmental Psychology: How Nature and Nurture Interact*, 7.

Great Aunt Jimmy's death initially leaves Cholly in a state of suspended animation, albeit one 'enclosed in fastidious tenderness' (109). As Christian states, 'the chord patterns of Cholly's life are transformed'.[699] Nevertheless, the extended family warmly welcome him and life continues relatively smoothly, although, when two white men catch Cholly having sex, the result is that hate and derision are offloaded onto the girl, the immediate witness to his impotence and humiliation. In order to make sense of individual behaviour, Richardson argues that the traditional 'nature versus nurture' theory has fundamental weaknesses, and proposes an alternative perspective that,

> Describes a world in which development occurs through internal reorganization, self-organization, of the developmental system, which comprises the organism in its environment. It is in and only in the interactions between the organism and the environment that invariance, structure, comes to be utilized. Invariance is transformed into information…Our actions are transformed.[700]

Cholly internalises his immediate thought processes but fails to reorganise this information; his anger is directed back onto a member of his own community and not the white perpetrators of his humiliation. Thus Cholly fails to psychologically re-organise within a racist environment; he is unable to disseminate the interactions of the black community within a predominantly powerful white society. There is no positive volte-face or utilisation of negative experiences as illustrated in *Grange Copeland*, thus Cholly's actions are not transformed. As Richardson contends, 'all developmental influences are mediated via our *personal characteristics*' making it 'an intensely

[699] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, 147.
[700] Richardson, *Developmental Psychology: How Nature and Nurture Interact*, 208.

individual experience' [my emphasis].[701] Cholly may mirror Brownfield by going in search of his father, believing 'His father would understand' (119), but here the similarity ends. Brownfield has nothing upon which to rely, however, Cholly is effectively already surrounded by 'family', namely Blue, his relatives and the community. Thus Morrison has created an opposition between Cholly's father's negative 'nature' and the positive nurturing in the past by Aunt Jimmy. However, Cholly's personal characteristics means that he will not embrace any constructive elements of his early life but will forge what Christian describes as a narcissistic life, 'alone with his own perceptions and appetites' as he cuts all ties with family and community.[702] With Pauline there was the potential for a loving relationship, just as there was at the beginning for Brownfield and Mem. Environment may make life exceedingly hard for characters such as these; however, other individuals survive and sometimes succeed. Mem had the most obvious potential, Julia and Fanny in *Wedding Band* are financially independent, even Mamie in *The Narrows* maintains finances and a family. The men concerned were equally involved at working toward a better future, except Brownfield and Cholly, who both destroy their daughters' lives.

The rape scene is a disturbing amelioration of past and present negative emotions and memories. Confusion melds with tenderness as Cholly attempts to touch Pecola in the same way as he did the first time that he met Pauline, but irritation and aversion infuse the drunken Cholly as he rapes Pecola. For him, the past, Pauline and his daughter merge to form the 'enemy'. During the traumatic rape, Cholly's hatred mixes with affection, and afterward, a bizarrely belated tenderness makes him cover the unconscious

[701] Richardson, ibid.
[702] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, 148.

Pecola with a quilt. As women merge in Cholly's consciousness to form one single entity, now they become narratively divided as Morrison dramatically positions the mother above the prone body of the daughter. The irony is powerful and potent when one considers that Pauline looks down upon that 'ugly' baby to which she gave birth. The very child who caused 'pain' during childbirth is now 'lying on the floor…trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her' (97/129). Jill Matus points out that 'Morrison does not, it seems, write Pecola's feelings into the scene, but rather represents through their absence the collapse of witnessing that the rape effects'.[703] Furthermore, the irony is manifold as the reader has always known that this child becomes impregnated with her father's 'seed' (4). Alexander argues that 'as imperfect as Cholly is, he is still more genuine than Pauline. His rape of Pecola is reprehensible, but he does not rape her mind the way that Pauline and Soaphead do'.[704] Alexander, however, completely fails to recognise the duality of rape. The victim suffers both physical *and* psychological effects and 'these effects may be more severe for younger victims' who are more likely to experience 'major depression…generalized anxiety'.[705] Furthermore, sexually abused children are 'more likely than those not abused to have at least one psychiatric diagnosis'.[706]

[703] Matus, 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', 50.
[704] Alexander, 'The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*', 301.
[705] Mary P. Koss, et. al., 'The Global Health Burden of Rape', in *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* eds., Laura L. O'Toole and Jessica R. Schiffman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 232.
[706] Koss, ibid.

The Bluest Eyes

The disturbing emotions produced by the previous chapter are continued through the story of Soaphead Church whose counterfeit spirituality is juxtaposed with his spurious love 'and patronage of little girls' (132). However, Pecola's 'ugliness' is further emphasised by his apparent lack of interest in her pitiful unattractiveness when she calls at his house. Her request for blue eyes intriguingly seems the 'most fantastic and the most logical petition he had ever received. Here was an ugly girl asking for beauty' (138). Just as others before him, Soaphead uses Pecola to achieve his own aims and makes her believe that her prayer has been answered. Alexander argues that 'Soaphead assaults [Pecola's] psyche, taking from her any knowledge of her true identity'[707]; however, it must also be argued that Pauline and Cholly have already done significant damage. Christian proposes that Soaphead's 'distorted view of life flows from the same causes that transforms Mrs. Breedlove into a cruel martyr of a mother'.[708] Christian then extends this concept of distortion by suggesting that Morrison is making a statement 'about the tragedy of cultural mutilation'.[709] Vickroy takes this point even further when she argues that Morrison 'uses the motif of trauma to suggest the overwhelming power that the larger white culture wields in its slow, relentless obliteration of the value of "blackness"'.[710] As acceptable as these socio-political assumptions may be, they still fail to acknowledge the individual or personal trauma and how necessary it is that such issues are incorporated into literature. If the individual has little significance and is reduced to a

[707] Alexander, 'The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*', 299.
[708] Christian, *Black Women Novelists,* 149.
[709] Christian, ibid.
[710] Vickroy, 'The Politics of Abuse: The Traumatized Child in Toni Morrison and Marguerite Duras', 93.

mere motif and metaphor, then how does one consider a community, a race? By concentrating on the personal experience of one child, Morrison challenges what Haaken contends are 'societal resistances to recognizing sexual abuse'.[711] Haaken continues to argue that historically, 'women have been limited in the kinds of stories that can be told and on the areas of conflict which may be explored'.[712] Morrison duly resists such limitations by telling a disturbing story of the rape of a child.

Matus describes Pecola's story as one that remains 'incapable of transmission; she cannot tell it in the 'real' world. There is, therefore, no reclamation of the past in a way that allows Pecola to assimilate what has happened to her'.[713] However, this denies Claudia's ability to narrate and therefore reclaim Pecola's tale. It may be a second-hand portrayal, but it is told to what Matus describes as the real world, namely, the reader. Pecola will be the only one to 'see' her heavenly blue eyes and converse with her 'very best friend' (154), but this friend and Pecola's response 'is very similar to that of many trauma victims', who, as Robert Lifton has observed, feel compelled both to 'confront and to avoid traumatic experience'.[714] From a narrative perspective, Claudia will be the one who 'reconstructs' the trauma for the reader.[715] In this sense, Claudia's 'function' is to bear witness to Pecola's story and through this mediation the reader becomes enlisted as '"listener" and ultimate co-owner of the trauma'.[716]

Frieda and Claudia listen to the adults talk, and become aware that when they 'looked for eyes creased with concern' they 'saw only veils' (149). Pecola's pregnancy is

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[711] Haaken, 'The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire', 352.
[712] Haaken, ibid., 353.
[713] Matus, 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', 48.
[714] Robert Jay Lifton, 'Interview', *American Imago*, 48 (1991), 153-175 (162-3).
[715] Alexander, 'The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*', 302.
[716] Matus, 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', 48.

a communally unwanted baby (150-151). However, Claudia and Frieda intend to perform a miracle through a ritualised sewing of marigold seeds whose desired growth they hope will be reflected by the baby. This innocent action acknowledges Morrison's view that 'the inarticulate victims of abuse can be spoken for only inadequately…and yet that they need such interpretation from outside because they cannot do it alone'.[717] From a psychological standpoint, Pecola's traumatic situation reflects issues of adaptation whereby the stability of both the 'internal and external environment are of equal import', and the 'instability or change' is just as significant and all interrelational.[718] Therefore, Cholly transgressing his role as father forces the home environment into a state of flux, the instability of which causes Pecola's existing characteristics to transform. With regard to childhood development and cognition, Pecola cannot easily interpret present factors pertaining to her external world; the trauma of the rape is too profound for her to process. She has no information with which to deal with this situation, and therefore her brain has to re-create and internalise these outside issues, one in particular being her 'ugliness' and consequently her desire for blue eyes. Pecola's elected form of mental and emotional survival is to formulate a 'friend' within her psychic landscape; more especially, one who can see Pecola's blue eyes. This dissociation is because the 'traumatic memory is presented in split-off ego formations and emerges over time in a fragmentary re-experiencing of the trauma'.[719] We witness this through the questions the 'friend' asks Pecola regarding the rape. Alexander argues that Pecola's 'movement toward insanity is instead an indictment of the white cultural framework that has become her guide-post for

[717] Vickroy, 'The Politics of Abuse: The Traumatized Child in Toni Morrison and Marguerite Duras', 104.
[718] Richardson, *Developmental Psychology: How Nature and Nurture Interact*, 31.
[719] Haaken, 'The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire', 354.

living'.[720] This may be true on one level; however, to ignore the psychological impact of Pecola's traumatic experience seems to deny the significance of such childhood occurrences. This is not merely an 'imaginary friend' or 'reality-induced fantasy'.[721]

Fragmentation and obsession now rule Pecola's existence as seen through the seemingly normal conversation that she holds with her nameless new friend (152-162). The chatter continues in classic child-like style; however, through this, the reader learns that after the rape Pecola is taken out of school. This creates further isolation both physically and emotionally: 'You don't talk to anybody. You don't go to school. And nobody talks to you…even Mrs Breedlove doesn't say anything to you. Ever' (156). Furthermore, we learn how Pecola witnessed parental violence, drunkenness and degrading sexual relations. A second rape is mentioned and Pecola's ensuing silence is because of the mother's continuing refusal to believe the facts. The seriousness of this internalised conversation metamorphoses into light-hearted banter about Pecola's blue eyes, 'Prettier than Alice-and-Jerry Storybook eyes' (159); the continuing emphasis is on Pecola, she of 'the bluest eyes in the whole world' (161). The mention of children's storybooks, the previous use of rhymes, child-like hyperbole and the reminiscences of Frieda and Claudia, reinforce that this narrative is *their* vision of the world and bring the tale naturally to a close.

> So it was. A little black girl yearns for the blue eyes of a little white girl, and the horror at the heart of her yearning is exceeded by the evil of fulfilment…The damage done was total. (162)

[720] Alexander, 'The Fourth Face: The Image of God in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*', 299.
[721] Alexander, ibid., 300.

As Rosenberg suggests, a nine year old child's narration of Pecola's surrender 'to the messages transmitted by her culture', which Claudia resents, allows Morrison 'to expose their insidiousness'.[722] The sadness of the narrative similarly lies in Pecola's total isolation as a result of her obvious insanity whereby she jerks her head, flailing her arms 'in an eternal, grotesque futile effort to fly' (162). Now completely alone except for her 'friend', Pecola's trauma-induced madness is visible for all to see and consequently, avoid and ignore. Her community and family fail her and now she must reside in a literal sense, a peripheral character on the 'edge of town…among all the waste and beauty of the world – which is what she herself was' (162). Just as Cholly and Pauline 'ironically nurture death, so society contributes to Pecola's psychic death'.[723] Furthermore, the white community so respected by Pauline 'has little or nothing to do with Pecola. She is rejected out of hand'.[724]

In her community, Pecola becomes a paradigm against which to measure one's own sense of 'self', 'we were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness…her pain made us glow with health' (163). We can consider, therefore, how such an experience becomes integrated into ourselves, and in the case of Pecola, becomes not only a continuing communal experience and memory, but an example of how the 'self' has the capacity to suspend and inhibit an overwhelming threatening experience. Instead of a way of avoiding the trauma that she experienced, Pecola and her psychologically manifested 'very best friend' (154), is a way of dealing with the threat of complete internal destabilisation. Whenever we are faced with an overwhelming experience that we sense as potentially disintegrating, we have the ability to suspend it and 'freeze' it in an

[722] Rosenberg, 'Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*', 439.
[723] Klotman, 'Dick and Jane and the Shirley Temple Sensibility in *The Bluest Eye*', 125.
[724] Klotman, ibid.

unassimilated, amorphous form and preserve it in that condition indefinitely, or, for as long as the brain deems necessary.[725] Our biological structure seems able to identify in advance that to *wholly* and rationally experience the implication of the threatening occurrence would have the potential to destroy or disintegrate its core organisation.[726] Trauma is experienced in multiple ways: 'women who have been sexually assaulted by acquaintances may suffer more complicated effects and show a slower degree of recovery than women who are raped by strangers'.[727] Susan Brison explains how instantaneous psychological reactions to such trauma 'include terror, loss of control, and intense fear of annihilation. Long-term effects include the physiological responses of hypervigilance, heightened startle response'.[728] Judith Herman states how 'the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganized. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over'.[729] Thus, I argue, that the afore-mentioned psychological side-effects stem from a *conscious* awareness of the trauma.

In the case of Morrison's *The Bluest* Eye, the disintegrative effect of the external threat, as it is fully and physically experienced by Pecola, is achieved through the initial expression of emotion and painful feeling as seen through her preliminary confusion and silence, but it is only through this mechanism that she is able to recognise the significance of the threatening and traumatic events. The 'unthinkable' has occurred, the rape of the daughter by the father, and the fear engendered elicits a primitive defensive manoeuvre.

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[725] Ivor Browne, 'Psychological Trauma, or Unexperienced Experience', *ReVision*, 12 (1990), 21-35 (27).
[726] Browne, ibid.
[727] Laura L. O'Toole and Jessica R. Schiffman, eds., 'Rape', in *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 178.
[728] Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, 40.
[729] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: the Aftermath of Violence*, 34.

It is a desperate attempt by Pecola to forestall a psychological crisis by making the intrusion of threat inadmissible by a process of inhibition, namely, her particular form of internalisation. The psychological work of dealing with the experience is suspended, thus subverting assimilation and re-integration of mind, body and soul. This state of 'suspended animation' produces the symptoms of emotional blunting and numbing, which for Pecola appears her only future form of existence. As Claudia concludes at the end of the novel, 'It's too late. At least on the edge of my town, among the garbage and the sunflowers of my town, it's much, much, much too late' (164). Claudia comprehends the degree to which Pecola's 'vulnerability has been exploited by others…Her closing litany of the accommodations and falsifications that she and others have perpetrated articulates an understanding both of why Pecola stepped into madness and the terms on which she, Claudia, survived'.[730] If being 'dark meant never being considered beautiful', and if being 'other became a canonical part of black women's literature'[731], then Morrison successfully repositions the black female as the one who 'remember[s] and bear[s] witness'[732] in her fiction and challenges the reader to reconsider the impact of culturally prescribed notions of beauty through the eyes of younger members of a black society. More importantly, Morrison unsettles the reader with her subject matter of rape, highlights the plight of silenced victims of abuse and thus relocates the issue of trauma within the realms of literature. Such aestheticisation does not undermine the seriousness of trauma; rather, it forces society to accept the existence of traumatic events and trauma victims and how they are treated.

[730] 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', 53.
[731] 'Seeds in Hard Ground: Black Girlhood in *The Bluest Eye*', 439.
[732] 'Shame and Anger in *The Bluest Eye*', 51.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

KRISTIN HUNTER (1931 -)

God Bless the Child.

Adolescent Development – Black Mothers, Daughters and Intergenerational Relationships.

Figure 14. 5th Avenue crossroads in Harlem New York. Social aspirations on 'The Avenue' (*God Bless the Child*, 23). Photograph taken by the author, 2007.

Introduction

> I am committed to telling the truth. I think I've always been a realistic writer, and I'm not just into the agony and happiness of black women. I'm interested in the enormous and varied adaptations of black people to the distorting, terrifying restrictions of society…I marvel at the many ways we, as black people, bend but do not break in order to survive. This astonishes me…Every one of us is a wonder. Every one of us has a story.[733]

Considering the proliferation of her writings throughout her various careers as journalist and teacher[734], Hunter is relatively unknown to the twenty-first-century reader as a black female author of African American fiction. As Gerald Early states, 'It is distressing to find that of nine…book-length critical studies and anthologies devoted to black women writers, Kristin Hunter is given space in just one'.[735] However, her first narrative, *God Bless the Child,* was well received by critics when the novel was initially published. In 1964, Rollene W. Saal of the *New York Times* stated that despite 'some awkward lapses of style…Happily for the book's sake, Rosie, child of the gutter, is able to wrest the story back and make it her own'.[736] Henrietta Buck of the *Christian Science Monitor* commented:

> The book sounds like social tract. It's not. It is a story of people who have had the doors slammed on them once too often, who have become hobbled by the moral deformities of a fabricated society. The life they lead is like an immense, macabre charade [and]…When the unreality becomes too great…the rest of the world watches from the safe side of the invisible boundary.[737]

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[733] Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 84.
[734] Tate, ibid., 79.
[735] Gerald Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday in Kristin Hunter's *God Bless the Child*', *Black American Literary Forum*, 20 (1986), 423-442 (423). Hunter does appear in Claudia Tate's *Black Women Writers at Work.*
[736] Rollene W. Saal, 'What made Rosie Run?' *New York Times*, September 20, 1964.
[737] La Toya Chisholm et. al., 'V G: Artists Biography: Lattany, Kristin Hunter', *V G: Voices from the Gaps*, 14 November, 2005. < http://voices.cla.umn.edu/vg/Bios/entries/lattany_kristin_hunter.html> [accessed 07/2007].

In a similar vein, Miles Jackson wrote: 'Miss Hunter describes in an acrid style without preaching the frustrations of the Negro ghetto'.[738] This is a story about 'people' and, as Saal commented, *God Bless the Child* is a narrative that 'assumes tragic proportions'.[739] However, there is far more to this novel than the archetypal representation of black strife and black female subjugation. *God Bless the Child* forms part of a variety of contemporary realist narratives that were involved in creative reconfigurations of family and home, and worked to recuperate blackness from always meaning 'heterosexual', 'masculine', and 'poor'.[740] What emerged were contested narratives that challenged the very notion of 'blackness' itself.[741] Thus, through the lens of black feminism and sociological theories, an examination of black family configurations and variations will highlight and illustrate emerging issues and problems for black girls and women within the black community. On a more particular level, just as Audre Lorde depicts differing cultural attitudes between mothers and daughters, an examination of Rosie, Lourinda and Queenie will further enhance an understanding of African American women's roles and in Rosie Fleming's respect, of how an individual girl 'learns' to become a woman.

Hunter's own reading background denotes a variety of international influences that could arguably explain a literary desire to formulate a novel that would define not only what it meant to be black, but what it meant to be black and female. In an interview with Claudia Tate, Hunter detailed the novelists who have impressed her most, saying, 'at one

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[738] Miles M. Jackson, 'Significant Belles Lettres by and about Negroes Published in 1964', *Phylon*, 26 (1965), 216-227 (219).
[739] Saal, 'What made Rosie Run?'.
[740] James Baldwin 'saw his talent as universal, and he was determined that he should be free to write about anything or anybody he pleased', *Giovanni's Room*, vii.
[741] Bernard W. Bell, *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 245.

time it was J.P. Donleavy; then it was Steinbeck. Colette is the one I admire the most'.[742] Other authors mentioned included Ishmael Reed, Toni Morrison and Toni Cade Bambara, writers whom she explains as worthy of admiration for diverse reasons. Hunter's multiracial textual influences demonstrate a desire to expand a knowledge base that would remain constricted if built purely upon black history and narratives. This is not to suggest a disregard of that history because all the African American writers discussed in this thesis are obviously somehow affected by slavery, racism and bigotry. Undoubtedly 'race matters'[743], and it is of significance specifically because in the United States 'race remains a salient source of the fantasies and allegiances that shape our ways of reading' all forms of social experiences.[744] However, authors such as Alice Walker, Alice Childress, Ann Petry and Kristin Hunter, each assert the need to understand the past in order to forge a new and affirmative future, to create a potential and positive black self-representation where there has previously been a void. As Joanne Gabbin argues, 'change' is rooted in 'their unabashed confrontation with the past and clear-eyed vision of the future'.[745]

[742] Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 87.
[743] Claudia Tate, *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.
[744] Elizabeth Abel, 'Black Writing, White Reading: Race and the Politics of Feminist Interpretation', *Critical Inquiry*, 19 (1993), 470-498 (497).
[745] Joanne V. Gabbin, 'A Layin On of Hands: Black Women Writers Exploring the Roots of Their Folk and Cultural Tradition', in *Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and the Contemporary Literary Renaissance* eds., Joanne M. Braxton and Andree Nicola McLaughlin (London: Serpent's Tail, 1990), 248-249.

Black Individual and Collective Characterisation

Whilst governing racial ideologies endeavour to reify the 'categorical, essentialist, representational languages depicting black life and experience' as defective, what is classified as *blackness* is 'continually being reconstituted as African Americans inhabit widely differentiated social spaces'.[746] bell hooks refers to the term 'postmodern blackness' to designate the complex and intricate ways in which other positions such as those of gender, class, sexuality, region, nationality, also determine the representation of African American identities.[747] Thus, different occasions and social contexts allow individuals to activate and to be perceived by one or more of the various constituents of their identities. Rosie Fleming, Hunter's female protagonist, is one of those individuals who manage to complicate classifications of not only race, class and sexuality but also gender. Her childhood and adolescent attitudes toward future aspirations may be influenced by her colour and community; however, her adult conception of womanhood and independence is shaped as a result of a far wider misogynist culture.

Rosie lives in the poor area of Harlem with her working mother and grandmother. Rosie dreams of bigger and better things so as to transcend her situation and leaves school early to get a job. However, along with this she believes the best and quickest way is to become involved in the local male-run numbers game – illegal gambling. The pressure of work, finances and family problems ultimately prove too much and lead to Rosie's premature death. Throughout the text Rosie demands more from life than the

[746] Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 11.
[747] bell hooks, *Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 23-31.

pitiable socio-economic potential culturally allotted to an African American family. Furthermore, Rosie purposefully assumes a necessary masculine mantle in order to fulfill her dream of a secure and financially independent future for herself and her family. Rosie believes that to triumph over her environment, she must merge, to some degree, with the seedier side of life.[748] Thus the text introduces issues of how the individual interacts with immediate family and the wider community and the potential effects upon personal development from childhood to adulthood. Sociologist Walter Allen provides four levels of ecological environments that provide an illustration of poignant aspects of *God Bless the Child:*

> (1) The microsystem, a developing person's immediate setting;
> (2) The meosystem, settings where the developing person participates;
> (3) The exosystem, settings that the person may never enter but where events occur to affect [her] immediate environment; and
> (4) The macrosystem, patterns of ideology and social organization characteristic of a particular society or culture.[749]

Rosie's immediate setting of a 'roach-infested tenement…a familiar stereotype'[750] is one that Hunter contests later in the narrative with a family move to a better neighbourhood. Rosie participates and matures in the meosystem of 'The Avenue'; however, this masculine environment is an exosystem that ultimately denies her access and affects the narrative conclusion. Furthermore, the macrosystem of a patriarchal and racially motivated society will erode all positive attempts made by a young black woman.

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[748] Joyce Pettis, *Toward Wholeness in Paule Marshall's Fiction* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 111.
[749] Walter R. Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', *Sociological Forum*, 10 (1995), 569-592 (580).
[750] Allen, ibid., 570.

Throughout this development, Rosie's immediate family will play a crucial role: 'the earthy values of her mother and the genteel values Granny had formulated after forty years serving wealthy white people [will provide] Rosie with distorted views on money' and her role in society.[751] However, for the majority of the story, ironically, Rosie's view is not distorted but driven by determination to succeed financially. She refuses to remain silent and submissive as Queenie and Lourinda have done in a *social* context. This echoes bell hooks' claim that unlike many white middle-class women, 'in black communities…women have not been silent…our struggle has not been to emerge from silence…but to change the nature and direction of our speech…one that is heard'.[752] The importance here is the female socio-political speech that must be heard and is so often muted in both black and white society. Thus Hunter offers, as Gabbin contends, a form of writing that challenges 'the premises upon which women have been defined' and depicted in American society.[753] Along with writers such as Ann Petry, Hunter illustrates that determined self-awareness is critical if black women are to develop the inner resources they need in order to cope with substantial social forces.[754] Furthermore, if Rosie's life appears 'tragic and somewhat bitter…it is because the world of the ghetto in reality is harsh'[755]; she at least attempts to exorcise 'the devils of stereotyping that had relegated too many images of black women to the roles of mammies, harlots, and confused and tragic mulattoes'.[756]

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[751] Jackson, 'Significant Belles Lettres by and about Negroes Published in 1964', 219.
[752] bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989), 6.
[753] Gabbin, 'A Layin On of Hands: Black Women Writers', 246.
[754] Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 175.
[755] Jackson, 'Significant Belles Lettres by and about Negroes Published in 1964', 219.
[756] Gabbin, 'A Layin On of Hands: Black Women Writers', 248.

Through Rosie's character, Hunter plays with 1950s and early 1960s cultural expectations regarding gender and race in a similar vein to Petry's character Link Williams. Both novels are Bildungsroman stories about growing up black. For both Hunter and Petry, challenge is paramount in order to metamorphose social preconceptions of 'blackness'. Link is, 'uncharacteristically', college-educated, widely traveled, knowledgeable, a young black Adonis through whom Petry succeeds in portraying a positive black masculinity. Rosie is outspoken, feisty, independent and aspiring, yet for both Link and Rosie, their eventual downfalls can primarily be apportioned to not only a wider white social unacceptance of their endeavours to succeed, but also to their immediate family and community conspiring with black and white constructions of ethnicity. The aped gentility and conventional racial attitudes of Link's adoptive mother Abbie Crunch and Rosie's grandmother Lourinda continues notions of black subservience. In contrast, Rosie's mother Queenie and Link's father figure Bill Hod stress the irreconcilable differences of black and white.

Mothering and Security

God Bless the Child amalgamates many of the facets of African American realist narratives through the character of Queenie. Similarly to Lutie, Queenie is a single working mother who works in a beauty salon; both women are also restricted to the insecure nature of self-employment. As Lutie sang in a night club for her money, Queenie also offers her customers a momentary escape from the grind of day to day life with a new appearance. Reality is somewhat different. Queenie muses about complaining

clients and the dearth of decent men for women her age. Her rumination becomes one of resentment as she thinks of Lourinda and her 'wasted life of devotion…And having the nerve to put on airs when she came' to visit from her place of work with a white family (8).[757] Their relationship is particularly fraught and further resentment and disagreement regarding the raising of Rosie widens the emotional chasm between them. Gerald Early argues that at the heart of the novel is the relationship between Rosie and Queenie which, 'through no fault of either of the parties who constitute it, precipitates Rosie's tragedy'.[758] This argument, however, fails to acknowledge Lourinda's participation as both mother and grandmother. Furthermore, Early's theory is too narrow in its focus when one considers that major stress must be placed upon 'the interconnectedness occurring not only within' the African American family, but also between Allen's 'different system levels' discussed earlier.[759] The individual, the family unit, and the immediate environment all embody a multitude of characteristics that 'help determine whether certain conditions are positive or negative…and to what degree'.[760]

As a black child in a deprived area, regarded as a peripheral character by society at large, Rosie already behaves and believes there is little point in education. Rosie appears to be able to physically care for herself and make her own decisions; however, this adult behaviour is undermined as Hunter juxtaposes this with a childhood picture of Rosie dressing up in her mother's clothes. Rosie reflects on the many 'uncles' that have come and gone, thus inviting the reader to compare Queenie's boyfriends with the scuttling cockroaches in the kitchen. This scene thus encapsulates Deborah Salem's proposal that

[757] Kristin Hunter, *God Bless the Child* (1964; London: Frederick Muller Ltd., 1965). Hereafter, page numbers cited in text.
[758] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 425.
[759] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 580.
[760] Allen, ibid., 575.

'the three domains of family process – parental support, parental monitoring, and family conflict – have been found to be particularly relevant for adolescent development'.[761] The suggestion therefore is that Rosie's early development contains much conflict alongside a lack of support and monitoring due to economic necessity. Queenie must work. This microsystem and day-dream sequence raises several issues. It highlights Rosie's intrinsic childhood innocence and desire to be like her mother. However, a smashed perfume bottle brings forth an irate Queenie. The confrontation demonstrates the emotional division between this mother and daughter, seen most poignantly when Rosie questions the nature of the 'word "Mom"', a word that forms like 'a hard lump of coal in her throat' (14). Their differences begin and end with the very meaning of a word.

This necessitates asking the question of what being a 'mother' really means. Various definitions illustrate the fluidity of the word itself.

> **mother**, *n* a female parent; that which has produced anything; the female head of a religious house or other establishment; a familiar term of address to…extended to an ancestress, a stepmother, mother-in-law, foster-mother.[762]

As the definitions demonstrate, there is no maternal or emotional association to the word 'mother'. 'Mother' or 'Mom' is an emotional concept as well as being definitive words.[763] The true relevance of these words is found in the emotional ties that exist between mother and baby. The significance of the word stems from how differing

[761] Deborah A. Salem, et. al., 'Effects of Family Structure, Family Process, and Father Involvement on Psychosocial Outcomes among African American Adolescents', *Family Relations*, 47 (1998), 331-341 (332).
[762] Catherine Schwartz, ed., *Chambers Concise Dictionary* (Edinburgh: W and R Chambers Ltd., 1991), 679.
[763] Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis, 'Black Mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Functions in American Society', in *Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 83.

cultures have historically allotted varying meanings to it; and these can diverge greatly. There has been a traditional, cross-cultural reproductive assessment of women centered on their potential to bear offspring. This often meant that neither enslaved black women nor free white women in colonial America had power or influence over their childbearing or their children.[764]

With regard to mothering, Adrienne Rich argues that 'few women growing up in a patriarchal society can feel mothered enough; the power of our mothers, whatever their love…their struggles on our behalf, is too restricted'.[765] Rich furthers this argument by stating that education of daughters must be in order to enable them to survive; however, this denies the diverse psychological make-up of the individual. Queenie may believe that 'tough love' is a prerequisite for life in the ghetto, but 'at least in this case' Early contends, it 'fails'.[766] In 'attempting to avoid "softening" Rosie…Queenie helps to cripple Rosie, who, instead of becoming tougher, finds herself being used as a pawn'.[767] There is truth to this statement, but it lacks wider considerations of Rosie's personal choice, her environment and alternative influences by peers and superiors.

From the slavery period we find evidence of the critical caretaking role performed by older relatives and peers and the powerful influence of grandmothers and unrelated elder women in the rearing of young children. Reflections of these more extended patterns of childrearing are relevant in modern black communities where children seem to be less focused on the principal adult as the central figure for sustenance and guidance

[764] Shirley A. Hill, 'In Search of the Village: Black Motherhood in Transition', in *Black Intimacies: A Gender Perspective on Families and Relationships* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2005), 123.
[765] Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), 243.
[766] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 431.
[767] Early, ibid.

and seem more likely to seek help and support from people of their own age. The character of Rosie acts as a paradigm for this cultural continuum of how other individuals play significant roles, other than the traditional figure of the mother. Characters such as Dolly, Mr. Schwartz, Larnie, Tommy and Benny transmit varying cultural values, survival techniques and role modeling that go beyond anything that Queenie or even Lourinda can teach. However, as a child, Rosie still requires an element of emotional security, a hypothesis that proposes that 'protection, safety, and security are among the most salient and important goals in the hierarchy of human goals'.[768] Patrick Davies et. al. argue that 'theorists have long underscored the significance of emotional security in accounts of normal development' and further this by 'positing that the child's emotional security is a significant goal across multiple family relationships'.[769] However, for Rosie, this basic requirement is lacking due to Queenie's failure to mother in a positive way and Lourinda's interference 'with her granddaughter's up-bringing'.[770]

Shirley Hill argues that African American mothers are presumed as somehow bestowed with an inherent aptitude for nurturing, that they experience parenthood as natural and essentially rewarding.[771] This narrow characterisation portrays black women as self-assured individuals who effortlessly cope with the responsibilities of child-rearing, efficiently incorporating mothering, work and communal pursuits. Hunter problematises such generalised stereotypes and through *God Bless the Child* she demonstrates that motherhood can be a precarious journey, particularly for underprivileged black women who face elevated health and societal risks in having and

[768] Patrick T. Davies et. al., 'Child Emotional Security and Interparental Conflict', *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 67 (2002), 1-127 (5).
[769] Davies, et. al., ibid.
[770] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 431.
[771] Hill, 'In Search of the Village: Black Motherhood in Transition', in *Black Intimacies*, 121.

raising children.[772] Queenie feels isolated and adrift where mothering is concerned. The relationship is illustrated as strained through Rosie's difficulty in vocalising the word 'Mom', and Queenie's apparent widening of the rift between them. Sadly, Rosie endeavours to feel sympathy for her mother's predicament; however, the thought of her grandmother's imminent arrival means this is merely a fleeting attempt at compassion.

When Lourinda arrives, she always bears gifts and food and for the impressionable Rosie, this is better than Pandora's Box.[773] Ironically, Lourinda acts as a modern version of Pandora, for within her 'magic container' are items that may replicate riches and pleasure but in reality will only spur the adult Rosie on to continually work in order to spend and acquire. This is a perfect example of Allen's 'exosystem'; Lourinda introduces Rosie to a 'white' setting that she 'may never enter but where events occur to affect' her immediate environment and development.[774] From caviar sandwiches to faded blue silk sashes, Lourinda introduces Rosie to a world of possibilities that will eventually lead to her demise. This will be Rosie's curse. As the evils of the original Pandora's Box flew forth, the contents and effect of Lourinda's magic container will continually and literally afflict her granddaughter. Ironically, the contents are 'white' in origin and despite the class and economic division between the two families; unsurprisingly, the black characters will 'pay' for the apparently free bounty.

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[772] Hill, ibid., 123.

[773] In Greek legend, Pandora was the first mortal female. To punish Prometheus who had stolen fire to give to man, Zeus ordered that a beautiful woman be made and named Pandora ('All-Gifted') because each of the gods gave her some power or attribute, which were to bring about the ruination of man. Pandora married Prometheus's brother bringing with her a large jar or vase (Pandora's Box) which she opened and all the evils flew forth to afflict the world. Hope alone remained in the box. Adrian Room, ed., *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (London: Cassell, 2004), 875.

[774] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 580.

Modern Myth-Making and Fairy-tales

In an interview with Claudia Tate, Hunter states that 'stories are waiting to be written'.[775] In *God Bless the Child* stories are there to be told; however, their respective influence has far-reaching effects. Lourinda begins to tell Rosie about her white charge, Miss Iris, and her impending birthday party. However, tales of culinary excess stand in stark opposition to Rosie's life of cockroaches and congealed and burned 'grits' (11). Rosie eagerly awaits each new installment and literally eats up every morsel of Iris's life: 'Crunching the noodles of her chow mein, Rosie tasted sugared violets and roses' (18). This recalls Pecola's eating of Mary Jane sweets in *The Bluest Eye*: 'to eat the candy is somehow to…be white…blond', to be 'Mary Jane' (38). Rosie's consumption differs from Pecola's because the ingestion of her grandmother's story will become synonymous with Rosie's excessive spending later in the novel, whereas for Pecola, the desire is purely psychological.

As if the image of Pandora's Box were not enough, Hunter further permeates the narrative with excess through Lourinda's tales. This façade is noted by an increasingly drunken Queenie who appears to see the social and racial truth more clearly through her alcohol induced stupor than her sober mother and daughter. Queenie tries to warn Rosie by telling her 'don't let her fool you'; furthermore, Lourinda's stories of her 'white folks' serve to make Queenie feel 'blacker', thus involving the complexities and degrees of colour (18). Queenie's dirty yellow breasts, Lourinda's peanut tinted skin both contrast with Rosie's ruddy maple colour as Hunter cloaks their conversation with a classic

[775] Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 84.

nursery story. As Red Riding Hood[776] would comment to the wolf in disguise, 'My, what big teeth you have', and Rosie echoes this when she asks, 'Granny, how come you're so light?', soon followed by 'Granny…if you are so light then why am I so dark?' (19). Not only does this raise issues of mixed race heritage, but also of Lourinda's own prejudice toward darker skin. As though echoing Fanny from *Wedding Band* and Abbie Crunch from *The Narrows*, Lourinda snaps, 'I tried to bring this girl up right, and then she ran off and got married without thinkin' about improvin' the race' (19). This negates sociological theories that propose that 'the conventional picture of adult child-parent relations suggests closer relations when adult children have children'.[777] Additionally, Lourinda's loyalty to her white family and intermittent visits refute the argument that 'Grandmothers provide more help to their adult children the younger the grandchildren'.[778] Mothering on all levels comes under Hunter's scrutiny and forces the reader to accept that not all women succeed in this particular female task.

With regard to the Red Riding Hood story, one could question in *God Bless the Child*, who *is* the wolf in disguise? The original tale may reunite the grandmother and granddaughter; however, in Hunter's narrative the boundaries are more blurred. Queenie may not be the fairy-tale mother and yet she will never hide the truth from Rosie or fill her mind with unattainable dreams. In contrast, Lourinda stems the flow of reality by giving her a glass bowl thus re-positioning Rosie within a fairy-tale realm, for as Rosie views her family through the thin glass, life becomes rainbow coloured and 'the whole room turned beautiful' (20). Queenie literally attempts to burst Rosie's bubble by demanding the bowl which inevitably breaks as though mirroring the earlier

[776] Room, ed., *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 706.
[777] Diane N. Lye, 'Adult Child-Parent Relationships', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 22 (1996), 79-102 (93).
[778] Lye, ibid.

fragmentation of the perfume bottle. As the argument reaches its climax, Lourinda is at hand, with what appears to be a never-ending supply of gifts from her magic container, as she offers Rosie a 'big curly-haired doll' (22). Again, significant echoes of Claudia's 'big, blue-eyed Baby Doll' abound.[779] Hunter, however, not only plays with notions of colour but repositions the image of a little black girl and a white doll within a traditional European tale, such satire being a 'more effective technique for expressing social statements than direct comment'.[780] Now in the day bed with the doll, Rosie reflects on its levels of comfort and images of Goldilocks arise.

> The lumpy day bed felt full of rocks. It was not as nice as Rosie's own stiff little bed but it was better than Mom's mattress where you sank until you drowned. (22)

As noises seep through from her mother and friends in the front room, Rosie considers how her mother comes alive at night, as though, along with a broken glass slipper, or perfume bottle, or colourful bowl, Queenie resembles the darker contemporary version of Cinderella. Queenie certainly feels the drudge of the house, unappreciated and never in receipt of gifts; thus, instead of going to the ball, she brings the party to her house. This may be the bright time for Queenie; however, it is the darkest moment for Rosie as she lies alone.

The opposition of light and dark, dream and nightmare, laughter and terror heighten the sense of the fairy-tale structure in this section of the novel. In an act of mimesis, Hunter presents a second mode of the original story by retelling and repositioning several classic tropes. Lourinda may initially occupy the narrative space of

[779] Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (1970; London: Vintage, 1999), 13.
[780] Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 85.

the beneficent fairy godmother, however, she will ultimately aid Rosie's downfall. Thus, Lourinda is an amalgamation of good and evil as she offers Rosie an apparently perfect and yet 'poisoned apple' whenever she proffers a gift. The glass bowl is the ideal example because when it smashes Rosie prophetically shouts at her mother, 'When I grow up I'll have another one just like it…And I won't let you touch it…'cause you'll be dead' (21). The adult Rosie will go into deeper debt as a result of buying a large crystal bowl (230) and her mother's death will worsen her financial situation.

Similarly, Queenie blurs several archetypes by occupying both the position of the dominant and dominated. From the socially subjugated drudge to the bright centre of attention to the honest soothsayer, Queenie is less dangerous for her daughter than Lourinda with her Pandora's Box. Queenie stays constant as a character, never claiming to be able to provide such promises and delights. In fact the opposite is true as Queenie realises the immense difficulties in life for a young black woman. However, as Early argues, 'the obvious, straightforward irony of both Rosie's attempt at independence and her mother's child-rearing techniques might be dismissed quite quickly'.[781] After all, Rosie is not the strong sturdy girl as Queenie presumes but physically fragile. Rich asks the question: 'what do we mean by the nurture of daughters? What is it we wish we had, or could have, as daughters; could give, as mothers? Deeply and primarily we need trust and tenderness'.[782] One may consider Lourinda and Queenie in Rich's addition: 'we need not be the vessels of another woman's self-denial and frustration'.[783]

[781] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 430.
[782] Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 246.
[783] Rich, ibid., 247.

Influences of the Street, Family and Friends

Despite the fairy story books that she reads in class, Rosie 'didn't understand why she had to go to school…School was for kids, and she had been born grown up' (23). This may refer to her youthful desire to rebel, but also has much to do with the manner in which she has been brought up. Sociologists Anne Statham Macke and William Morgan argue that:

> Socialization by mothers, a key determinant of daughters' work orientation, has been thought to operate via positive role-modeling. But socialization also occurs through negative modelling, normative influence, and conditional modelling.[784]

The normative influence of the street with its hustlers become Rosie's schooling of choice; Queenie and her form of 'female' employment, or Lourinda's domestic employment hold little interest. However, Granny still has a firm hold on her granddaughter's hopes and dreams and Rosie appears resolved to allow her this power. Early suggests that this is due to Rosie wanting 'to keep alive her own source of imaginative escape from the ghetto' rather than it being an 'overzealous love'.[785] Contrastingly, Queenie remains a tangential influence, with the lack of input regarding the socialising of her daughter acting as the antithesis to many sociological arguments.[786] Salem et. al. illustrate that a 'growing body of research suggests that factors other than

[784] Anne Statham Macke and William R. Morgan, 'Maternal Employment, Race, and Work Orientation of High School Girls', *Social Forces*, 57 (1978), 187-204 (187).
[785] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 432.
[786] Salem, et. al., 'Effects of Family Structure, Family Process, and Father Involvement', 333.

family structure may be more influential' in adolescent development.[787] Friends, lovers and street characters will all have diverse influences upon Rosie's future.

By the age of seventeen, the foundations of Rosie's adult life are firmly in place although externally she 'seemed scarcely to have grown any larger over the years. She was still nothing but skin and bones and energy' (33-35). Larnie Bell is Rosie's narrative opposite, his light skin, health and vitality along with his intention to continue into higher education contrasting with the darker skinned, chain-smoking over-worked Rosie. He represents decency, earnestness, music and wider social possibilities; she exemplifies the street, gambling, money and danger. Rosie's maxim is that a person must make it on his or her own and she eloquently states what autonomy means to her through the words of Billie Holiday: 'Mama may have and Papa may have, but God bless the child that's got his own' (37). Early accurately contends that 'the significance of the song as a thematic reference…is plain, for it is predicated on the unsettling and disruptive effect that money can have'.[788] For Rosie, money is the language of the street and the route to independence and security. She is indifferent to education, believing that intrinsically it has little to offer people like herself. Furthermore, Rosie systematically removes herself emotionally from family. Rosie fails to comprehend that, as Allen argues,

> Individuals exist in the context provided by their families; families exist in the contexts provided by their communities; and communities exist in the contexts provided by the larger society. Central to this model are the twin notions of interdependence and interpenetration.[789]

[787] Salem, et. al., ibid., 332.
[788] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 426.
[789] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 584.

This failure to understand interdependence and interpenetration between all facets of her life leads to Rosie feeling isolated in her determined effort to work longer hours and earn more money. This effort will only have a negative effect 'on the relationship between parent and child'[790], but it must be additionally argued, also with work colleagues, friends and prospective life partners.

As Macke and Morgan suggest, black mothers have 'been more likely to work than have white mothers…as a result, black women probably do not face the strong prohibitions' with which mid-century white women have been confronted.[791] Thus, Rosie joins the ranks of black working women; however, Rosie wants to be self-employed, not like Queenie, whose 'occupational status' has merely served as a negative role model for her daughter.[792] This will appear especially naïve in retrospect as the local neighbourhood is under the overall organisation of an unknown syndicate. Nevertheless, Rosie's aspirations remain intact as she approaches the local major player, Benny. This is a male dominated world and Rosie realises the possible dangers for the first time as she 'was suddenly conscious that she had stepped into waters that were over her head. They were unexpectedly cold. But she did not panic' (48). Early argues that Queenie has 'miseducated Rosie about the nature of survival in the ghetto and about the larger, competitive male world'.[793] However, Rosie also falls prey to the image of 'the strong black woman', with Hunter stating that 'it becomes a hard thing to live up to…to buy the superwoman myth is no good'.[794] Despite this, Rosie continues unswervingly on her

[790] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 426.
[791] Macke and Morgan, 'Maternal Employment, Race, and Work Orientation of High School Girls', 188.
[792] Macke and Morgan, ibid.
[793] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 429.
[794] Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 88.

chosen course, with Benny imparting some advice that could easily be taken as a general instruction about life:

> Everybody in this world has a role, Benny said enigmatically, You want the secret of success? Find out what your role is and play it. You've got a lot to learn, Rosie or whatever your name is. You better do yourself a favour. Come to work for me. Keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut…I'll let you know when you're ready to do more. (50)

Benny exemplifies the patriarchal attitude of many of the black male characters in the novel. The alliterative and shifty Tommy Tucker continues this masculinist vein; however, he tends to be a sexual predator as opposed to Benny's more traditional aggressive authority akin to Bill Hod in *The Narrows*. Their narrative functions are not only to display male power and control at street level, but also to demonstrate the insidious nature of sexism and patriarchy where predominantly black women are concerned. These men exemplify the double jeopardy that African American women suffer, of both inherent cultural chauvinism and indiscriminate racism in American society. Parallel to this, Audre Lorde and fictional women such as Ruth Copeland, Julia Augustine, Queenie and Rosie Fleming portray the hazardous journey of attempting to successfully navigate their lives. Writers such as Morrison, Walker, Childress and Hunter depict characters whose 'stories are inevitably tied to the life of their communities'.[795] Thus, Christian argues, such narratives, despite appearing 'to be narrow', are far more

[795] Barbara Christian, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 241.

complex and 'perhaps even broader than many works in which the white world is prominent'.[796]

Furthermore, these black female characters must often face the aggression of forceful masculine characters. Margaret and Mem Copeland and Pecola Breedlove are exemplars of those who have fallen as a result of male hatred. For the women who have fallen and for those who struggle, it is the ideological structures of a prevailing black and white patriarchal hegemony against which they have to continually battle against and those male individuals who continue this form of oppression. Black female authors illustrate this subjugation by first and foremost depicting the individual character *within* her 'specific ethnic community'.[797] Thus, Hunter shows how Rosie will fail because she has no visualisation beyond the street in which she wants to succeed. Also, her fall will result from her attempts to challenge preconceived notions of social female behaviour through becoming part of the masculine culture that surrounds her, those very organisations that dominate and of which she has not been warned through female and familial means. Audre Lorde made a cautionary statement warning us that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house', thus urging women to reconsider their actions and to:

> engage in a process of visionary thinking that transcends the ways of knowing privileged by the oppressive powerful if we are to truly make revolutionary change…it is easy for women and any exploited or oppressed group to become complicit in structures of domination, using power in ways that reinforce rather than challenge or change.[798]

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[796] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, ibid., 242.
[797] Bonnie TuSmith, *All My Relatives: Community in Contemporary Ethnic American Literatures* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 70.
[798] hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, 36.

Black Mothers and Daughters

Thus 'education' becomes the key concept. Whether that form of social learning comes from family or other communal ties is not particularly significant, especially when one considers Allen's point that black families are 'defined by complicated overlaps between location, functional relations, shared values, affiliations, and blood ties'.[799] Through such blood ties, Joyce Ladner notes that 'all children', in theory, 'develop a positive self-image mainly from the consistent love and care of…significant adults in their environment. This is especially true for the children of minority groups'.[800] However, as Allen contends, 'Black families represent complex systems of relationships that transcend' the multiple 'areas of life'.[801] Ladner's more psychologically inflected statement links both the individual and community whereas Gloria Joseph broadens her focus by arguing that 'Awareness of the difficulties their children will face…in a racist society causes deep concern for mothers in every socioeconomic class. The strength of the early nurturance helps carry the children through the difficult adolescent years'.[802]

Hunter plays with these differing theoretical representations of the black family. For Rosie, the concept of nurturing has been considerably different. Left mainly to her own devices or spoiled by her grandmother, Rosie's early formation of a positive self-image has been distorted. From cockroaches to caviar sandwiches, stories and baby dolls to smacks and assorted 'uncles', Rosie has had to patch together some semblance of an

[799] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 572.
[800] Joyce Ladner, 'Labeling Black Children: Some Mental Health Implications', *Urban Research Review,* 5 (1979), 3.
[801] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 572.
[802] Joseph and Lewis, 'Black Mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Functions in American Society', in *Common Differences,* 85.

existence and identity. Queenie has little that is positive to say about her daughter, even when it comes to fashion or men:

> How's she gonna find herself a man? She looked Rosie up and down. And how come you wear such dikey clothes anyway?...it makes you look like a little bull dagger…and you've cut your hair too short, too. How you ever expect to get a husband? (50)

Despite having had failed relationships herself, Queenie considers men and marriage as the objectives for which to aim. In comparison, Rosie not only shuns this idea but also physically pulls 'away from her mother' and all she stands for (51). However, Queenie is fully aware of the types of problems daughters such as Rosie will face in contrast to sons. The African American mother knows this intuitively from her own experiences as a black female being raised in a white, male dominated, heterosexual society.[803]

There is, however, an element of respect between Rosie and Queenie. As Gloria Joseph states, this is not to be construed so as to suggest that there is nothing but affection and appreciation between black mothers and daughters.[804] On the contrary, 'respect' does not mean an absence of quarrels, resentment, enmity or even fear. What it can imply is that the black daughter refrains from becoming emotionally or psychologically absorbed in the specifics of the relationship with the mother. Joseph suggests that eventual respect from the daughter stems from her knowledge and awareness of the experiences of the mother; of the difficulties of raising a family and the endurance necessary when confronted with racial and economic oppression. This all forms part of the learning

[803] Joseph and Lewis, ibid.
[804] Joseph and Lewis, ibid., 94.

process and culture of African American women.[805] However, Rosie does not appreciate any difficulties that her mother may have faced until similar incidents are experienced; in this case, racial and sexual harassment whilst working in Benny's bar (56).

Regarding Rosie's increased work orientation, 'normative influence' dominates rather than any 'positive role modeling'.[806] Rosie thus echoes Macke's and Morgan's statement that this phenomenon occurs as a result of a mother's lack of 'sex-role traditionality' parallel to 'the rate of mother-daughter conflict'.[807] Hunter relays such issues during a scene when an eighteen year old Rosie arrives home weary from work to find Queenie and 'uncle' Roscoe. Ironically, in this scene, an irritated Rosie demonstrates similar mannerisms to her mother; in fact, she verbally resembles a mother figure in her berating of Roscoe. Rosie is upset that Queenie dutifully gives away her share of the rent to Roscoe. Rosie feels that Queenie is 'generous to everyone. Except her own daughter. The grown-up daytime Rosie didn't give a damn, but the child in the lonely dark couldn't help caring. The child would never understand' (65). This image totally negates sociological theories that contend that 'relationships between mothers and daughters are thought to be emotionally closer and to entail…exchanges of assistance'.[808] Furthermore, Hunter's narrative undermines studies that find 'Grandparents are an increasingly important link in the generational chain' and 'serve important social and economic functions, frequently contributing to the harmony…and…stability of families'.[809] If the mother/daughter relationship was already strained then it becomes even more so, with

[805] Joseph and Lewis, 'Black Mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Functions in American Society', in *Common Differences*, 108.
[806] Macke and Morgan, 'Maternal Employment, Race, and Work Orientation of High School Girls', 187.
[807] Macke and Morgan, ibid., 190.
[808] Lye, 'Adult Child-Parent Relationships', 88.
[809] Vira R. Kivett, 'Racial Comparisons of the Grandmother Role: Implications for Strengthening the Family Support System of Older Black Women', *Family Relations*, 42 (1993), 165-172 (165).

Lourinda acting as arbitrator; however, the difference will be in the reversal of roles that will take place. Rosie is the main wage earner. With this in mind, Queenie approaches Rosie with a business proposition; however, they cannot communicate and are therefore, incapable of achieving anything positive. The space that Hunter provides her female characters is fraught with tension and emotion and this scene poignantly exemplifies the familial relationship between the three women. Early suggests that Rosie's 'refusal to lend her mother money…is an act of whim, an impulse she is able to indulge because she has the power to do so'.[810] However, this denies the psychological and emotional response that Rosie has had to her mother's 'generosity' toward others. It must be argued that the mother/daughter relationship goes far deeper than merely being based on financial issues. Early, however, does accurately state that 'Queenie is used by her lovers in much the same way Rosie is destined to be used by the men she attempts to compete against'.[811]

A history of black women, home, marriage, economics and family converge and collide as Queenie defends her position to financially support a husband such as Roscoe; after all, 'That's been going on since slavery' (73). Interestingly, it is Lourinda's response to Queenie's comment and in how she directs her observation toward Rosie that adds a distinct element of contemporaneous social commentary to the moment;

> It's a disgrace the way these young boys all want their wives strugglin' out to work. No matter how many babies they got draggin' around their necks…how come the fathers ain't working? How come they're hangin' on the street corners all day?...I hope you ain't gonna let no good-looking trash mess up your life. (73)

[810] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 428.
[811] Early, ibid., 429.

This comment echoes Elliot Liebow's observation that: 'the modal father-child relationship for these streetcorner men seems to be one in which the father is separated from the child, acknowledges his paternity…but provides financial support irregularly, if at all'.[812] Such black men are further discussed by Gloria Joseph who states:

> It is no secret to Black mothers that American society and Black culture combined have programmed their daughters for romantic love and marriage. The Black mother looks at the way Black men strut, strive, and connive in their undaunted roles…Knowing all this, what messages will she deliver to her daughters about men and marriage and how to get ahead as a Black woman in White America?[813]

Differing generational attitudes abound between the three women. Queenie appears to merely desire love and companionship, albeit, literally, at any cost. Lourinda demands that a prospective husband have the ability to 'provide for you' otherwise 'you're better off single' (73). Rosie now seems the arbitrator; her final decision is that a home and not a husband is the route to security and this is where the money is destined to be spent, rather than on Queenie's business venture.

The home in question is away from 'the steady shrinking of aspiration that shriveled a neighbourhood' such as her own (79). As thoughts of 'home' begin to transform Rosie's general view on life and work, Hunter reincorporates the potential love interest, dependable Larnie, but adds another figure, Tucker, who will 'strut, strive, and connive', safe in his undaunted role.[814] Just as Queenie is prepared to ignore the obvious menace of Roscoe, Rosie learns by rote, becoming emotionally inveigled and financially

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[812] Liebow, *Tally's Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men*, 78-79.
[813] Joseph and Lewis, 'Black Mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Functions in American Society', in *Common Differences*, 85.
[814] Joseph and Lewis, ibid.

deceived despite 'the lines of a song, 'Everybody's Somebody's Fool' running through her mind (93).

Money, Sickness and the 'Underclass'

The African American culture and its distinctive characteristics of compassion, familial networks, social aspirations and complex colour contradictions interrelate with and respond to an ethnically and socio-economically repressive environment and this is seen to a considerable extent in the middle section of the novel with the chapter aptly entitled, *Money, You Got Lots of Friends* (99). In Allen's definition of black American families, 'shifts in parameters…in some cases location' defines 'family as coterminous with household. In other cases, blood-ties define the boundaries'.[815] In *God Bless the Child*, blood ties involve the modern myth-making by Lourinda and the harsh emotional education through Queenie; location is determined via the masculine street-wise foundation that is formed in her childhood. All these amalgamate into an unreality in Rosie's perception of life as an adult. As a result of not facing her reality, Rosie will fall into a money-orientated driven fantasy that will eventually envelop and suffocate her essence and energy. Furthermore, as Early argues, 'while the women are living together in the same household, they show little ability to generate a collective bond of happiness, even to display cooperative communal spirit'.[816]

Juxtaposed with a desire for financial security is the need for love and warmth. However, Rosie has difficulty in recognising genuine affection where Larnie and Tucker

[815] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 572.
[816] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 435.

are concerned. Primarily, there are a number of incontrovertible essentials about black women's lives that must be accepted and conceded. Success has been achieved by a minority, while an unrelenting continuation of poverty is the reality for the majority of black women.[817] Additionally, black women have been characterised as frequently identifying themselves and their femininity, feelings of self-reliance and autonomy through their association with black men.[818] However, as Joseph contends, 'the majority of Black mothers see men as: abusive, no good, and unreliable; but the same mothers also assume and accept as a given that their daughters will marry these men'.[819] Adrienne Rich wrote that 'What we bring to childbirth is nothing less than our entire socialization as women'.[820] As this chapter argues, motherhood involves far more than the physical rearing of a child. However, society's expectations of motherhood are complex and varied and often act as an emotional burden when one considers Rich's comment.

For Rosie, sex and business unite through the character of Tucker; a mysterious individual who personifies the strutting, conniving 'role' of the black man. As a narrative device and measure of the female familial relationships in the Fleming household, Tucker is given the ability to delude and dupe, all through the power of language, ('it was amazing how words could mislead' (101)), and his charmingly superficial effect on Lourinda leads Rosie to doubt her grandmother 'for the first time in her life' (103). As though attempting to subvert the norm of marrying a 'no good' man, Queenie sees through Tucker's dangerous façade and makes this clear in her direct approach.

[817] Donna L. Franklin, 'Family Composition and the "Underclass" Debate', in *Ensuring Inequality: The Structural Transformation of the African-American Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 182.
[818] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 429.
[819] Joseph and Lewis, 'Black mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Functions in American Society', in *Common Differences*, 112.
[820] Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 182.

Ironically, Rosie has the capability to see through her own expensive clothes to the 'scarecrow' beneath, but she fails to act accordingly with Tucker (103). Rosie momentarily reveals this weakness to her mother who, in a momentary restoration of roles, issues forth some genuine maternal advice; nevertheless, the strained three-fold female relationship threatens to ruin any positive outcome. Queenie 'wants Rosie to be independent of a need for mothering. But instead of freeing Rosie to be a properly socialized lower-class black woman, this upbringing merely exacerbates both the girl's despair and loneliness'.[821] This uncomfortable reality is masked by a determined creation of the perfect family home, one of 'fine furniture, fine television, fine drapes at the windows…everything the best!' (110-111).

The superficiality of home obscures Rosie's perception of people such as Tucker. Benny, as the 'voice' of reason, attempts to explain Tucker's true nature to Rosie: 'That boy smiles crooked, talks crooked, even walks crooked. He knows better than to try any tricks with me. But a young girl like you ought to worry' (114). Rosie's childish refusals to believe the truth harks back to an innate desire to build a fantasy fortress around her in order to prevent an austere reality from penetrating. This echoes Hunter's own motivating force as a writer, 'to recreate the world I know into a world I wish I could be in'.[822] However, Rosie pushes this recreation of her world to the limit. Thus, the reader is made aware, as Early suggests, 'of the psychological tragedy caused by the paucity of beauty in Rosie's life'.[823] Lourinda is at fault for this need to emotionally detach herself from her family and Queenie is responsible for making reality so difficult to acknowledge. Only when Queenie gets stabbed, does Rosie understand her profound need for her mother,

[821] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 431.
[822] Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 83.
[823] Tate, ibid., 435.

rather than the frippery of fancy curtains and china, and in a desperately expressive moment, Rosie reveals this through the sincere power and repetition of words: 'Mom, please Mom, you're the only Mom I got' (121).

As Tucker exemplifies superficiality and deceit, so Larnie typifies fidelity and candour. Paradoxically, Lourinda's inability to see through Tucker is equalled by her distrust of Larnie, whose strength and health emphasise the weakness and sickness within the family of women. Thus, Hunter juxtaposes tumultuous emotions with failing health as 'Rosie got skinnier and more hollow-eyed and coughed more' (137). Concealing these facts becomes more important and clearly more difficult as both work colleagues and family notice her deteriorating physical condition. Therefore, faced with yet another reality that something sensible must be done, Rosie decides that retail therapy is superior to 'going to a doctor' and that 'lots of money had to be spent on things she didn't need, and some had to be lavishly wasted before she could breathe again' (140-141). Therefore, such spending demands a higher level of earning and reflects studies that find young black women's attitudes are to 'plan to work all the time'.[824] Joyce Ladner's 1968 research, 'On Becoming a Woman in the Ghetto' parallels the desire to earn with 'the intense emotional interest in the fads and trends of popular culture as well as an urge for flashy clothing and material items'.[825] Hunter juxtaposes obvious materialism with a need for love that stems directly from Rosie's financially and emotionally impoverished childhood. The hard shell that has taken a short lifetime to construct shows signs of external fracturing and only when Rosie addictively buys unnecessary commodities for Lourinda is there a feeling of completeness, of feeling 'purged and at peace. She was

[824] Macke and Morgan, 'Maternal Employment, Race, and Work Orientation of High School Girls', 192.
[825] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 434.

happy again, and her strength was restored' (142). This is not a spiritual peace, and only serves to reflect the dichotomy of life; it is a gay façade that conceals the fractiousness of her psyche. Additionally, as Rosie maintains her financial power, so she begins to objectify Larnie by viewing him as a consumable item; thus, Hunter reverses the masculine scopofilic gaze by locating it within black female control.

Progressively, Rosie temperamentally oscillates from angry to sullen to guilty to silent, thus forcing Larnie to psychologically react by fluctuating from lover to fatherly guide. As the women become sicker, so Larnie has to preserve his wholesome parental control that propels Rosie's comment:

> Everybody's sick, Rosie said in disgust. This house is worse than a damn leper colony. It's a damn House of Usher, that's what it is. (147)

As Edgar Allen Poe's 'House of Usher' figuratively and literally collapses under the weight of emotional and psychological anguish of the family within, then Rosie recognises the familial fragmentation within which she is enveloped. Lourinda intensifies this predicament by refusing to remain at home and care for Queenie, as she poignantly states, 'My folks need me' (147). Thus Lourinda negates the premise that 'At root, Black families are seen as institutions whose most enduring relationships are biological'.[826] The white family that Lourinda serves becomes more important than her own. The deterioration appears complete within the Fleming family, and as Usher and his ghostly sister replicate their environmental disintegration, the reader can only assume that the literary metaphor will continue.

[826] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 572.

This scene underscores the complex nature of care inside the family unit, the irony here being that Lourinda feels more loyalty to her white employer, Miss Helen, whose own deterioration necessitates continual care. As the walls of the House of Usher crumble around its inhabitants, then Lourinda acts as the final loose brick in her own household as she attests to the lack of solidity and solidarity. Where there should be mutual 'exchange', 'respect', 'high levels of agreement, closeness, and consensus'[827], there is instead altercation, disregard and a lack of intimacy. Granny's inappropriate sorrow for her employer's plight is prophetically noted by Queenie, who comments on Rosie's excessive need to comfort and indulge the old woman: 'She'll outlive us both, Rosie…All her life she'd lived in white folks' houses…we've had to take their crumbs' (148). Queenie then catalogues reality for many black Americans: 'Cold water flats…Rats. Roaches…Pneumonia. T.B…What kills me is seein' you kill yourself for her' (148). Allen claims that unquestionably 'poor health, chronic unemployment, teen parenthood, paternal absence, and poverty have potentially negative consequences for Black family organization and functions'.[828] This succinctly describes the Fleming family; however, as Allen suggests, 'the relative impact of these factors on particular families are mediated by those families' resources, values, and situations'.[829] The personal and societal become entwined in an inventory of poverty and disease; moreover, Queenie illustrates the separation that has occurred within her family in parallel to an obvious social imbalance. Lack of money for the Flemings has brought suffering, whereas ironically, for the Usher family, inherited wealth and past social prominence have not protected them from literal and figurative ruin.

[827] Kivett, 'Racial Comparisons of the Grandmother Role', 170.
[828] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 575.
[829] Allen, ibid.

Another more complex viewpoint is considered when Hunter describes the 'Avenue' and its 'layers and layers of classes within its masses of underprivilege' (151), thus illustrating that from the beggar to the individual with numerous jobs poverty itself has a multitude of differences. The 'underclass' is characterised as having the 'weakest attachment to the labor force' and have 'the lowest median income', and are more likely 'to live in public housing or in neighbourhoods with the highest concentration of poverty'.[830] It is therefore unsurprising that illegal income from gambling is rife in the Avenue. Benny again figures as a prophetic symbol when he repeats his earlier comments on role-playing by explaining to Rosie that 'the pain was written into [her] part' (155); so, just as her family, her relationships and health have fallen apart, now her future and dreamed security have little solid reality. Events take a turn for the worse as Rosie's health declines and her illegal dealings surface, thus forcing her main employer Mr. Schwartz to relieve her of her position. Personal complications arise in the guise of Tucker who still has an obvious effect upon Rosie. This forces the question as to why, with Larnie as support, Rosie would be prepared to return to Tucker; however, even analyses of the role of socialisation in the black woman's sexuality are necessarily complex. Joseph and Lewis explain how puritanical outlooks are existent in many black households, but in countless others, the approach is certainly not. What is familiar and true in most family units is that despite the consequences of whether or not sex is an approachable or unvoiced subject, black women do not obtain essential and truthful information about sexual matters.[831]

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[830] Franklin, 'Family Composition and the "Underclass" Debate', in *Ensuring Inequality*, 203.
[831] Joseph and Lewis, 'Styling, Profiling, and Pretending: The Games Before the Fall', in *Common Differences*, 182.

Further investigations of intimate relationships in the African American community have often concentrated on the predicament of younger, economically peripheral women and men, whose skeptical connections to matrimony are most apparent. Employing Rosie as the exemplar, these analyses highlight how young black females living in deprived, urban neighbourhoods are particularly vulnerable when it comes to pinning all their expectations of an improved life on locating the correct partner. Rosie states toward the end of the novel, 'I need a man who can do me some good', 'love' she has always believed she can live without (275). Joseph and Lewis continue to say that the childhood dearth of fatherly affection and positive male attention in conjunction with the bleak chances of evading poverty through educational or traditional career success heightens black women's searches for male spouses. They suggest this is in order to confirm black female self-esteem and thus provide them with a home, a family and adult status. Rosie may have the capability to offer a home; however, little in her background primes her, or black women in a similar situation, to demand a high opinion from potential suitors. Many of the men that they encounter lack the emotional maturity, material resources, or inclination to marry or form stable relationships and both Larnie and Tucker, in differing ways, comply with this role.[832]

Gender Socialisation and Politics

What are the forces at work that make an individual like Rosie behave the way that she does? How can the reader make sense of her life? Why is Rosie's disposition so forceful when juxtaposed with Larnie who appears much more composed? Hunter shifts the

[832] Hill, 'Love, Sex, and Relationships: The Pursuit of Intimacy', in *Black Intimacies*, 101.

gendered lens when one considers these two characters, thus insisting that the reader re-examine cultural assumptions of black femininity and masculinity. Rosie demonstrates socially prescribed notions of black female sexuality where Tucker is concerned and she similarly fulfils the trait that black daughters are taught the values of strength and independence.[833] However, she consistently attempts to break such confining categorisation by searching for escape routes. In this novel we see how gender and what is considered being a (black) woman becomes replicated in an array of organisations, and most notably, within the family unit.[834] Within the family, the principle of gender socialisation is that children 'observe, imitate, and eventually internalize the specific attitudes and behaviors that the culture defines as gender appropriate by using other males and females as role models'.[835] Rosie may mimic her mother's conduct and to a certain extent her attitudes, however, she differs in so many ways. Financial independence and business acumen separates them alongside Rosie's determination to become involved in a patriarchal culture. Queenie's character also tends to represent the past whereas Rosie is a child of the politically tumultuous present and emblematic of the budding women's liberation movement. Rosie never becomes politically involved but her resolute individualism still manages to mirror the prevailing atmosphere. Thus I argue that Hunter is a writer, along with Childress, Walker and Morrison, who is 'rooted in [her] unabashed confrontation with the past and clear-eyed vision of the future, in [her] inclination away from empty protest toward revelation and informed social change'.[836]

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[833] E. Higginbotham and L. Weber, 'Moving up with Kin and Community; Upward Social Mobility for Black and White Women', *Gender and Society*, 6 (1992), 416-40.
[834] A.C. Crouter, S.M. McHale and W.T. Bartko, 'Gender as an Organizing Feature in Parent-Child Relationships', *Journal of Social Issues*, 49 (1993), 161-74.
[835] W. Ickes, 'Traditional Gender Roles: Do they Make, and then Break, our Relationships?', *Journal of Social Issues*, 49 (1993), 79.
[836] Gabbin, 'A Layin On of Hands: Black Women Writers', 248-249.

The racial mood of the time is brought to the reader's attention with descriptions of 'scowling white troops and grim black ones' as battle lines are drawn in a nearby neighbourhood (187). This is a white reaction to new black residents that irritates Rosie because, as she tells a terrified Dolly, she 'was supposed to be the first coloured in the road' (188). White police are out in force to prevent more riots and the N.A.A.C.P. was doing a 'brisk competitive business' (188). However, Rosie considers them interlopers in *her* neighbourhood. This decries the conventional assumption that such a movement would, as Franklin points out, be 'committed to the provision of either direct or indirect services to the black family'.[837] The new house acts as a bridge between two worlds as 'with ease they slipped from the angry clutching hands of the present and stepped, like two Alices, into the dream of a leisurely eccentric past' (190).

Individualism is the key to Rosie's character. Despite the political fervour and antagonism that surrounds her, she is determined to maintain her own sense of freedom and yet still manages to literally and metaphorically move in on 'white' history by purchasing and entering this grand old house. The singing and the protest continue outside her windows and the scene becomes simultaneously comical and incongruous:

> We shall not, sang a stolid group circling on the pavement, we sha-ll not be moved. Like hell you won't be moved! Rosie shrieked at them. You better be off my pavement before I count to ten! They stopped, and blinked up at Rosie with mild startled eyes like black velvet. (192)

Rosie is her own 'one-woman move-in movement' that traverses myth and reality (193). She may demand the liberty to live where she wants and to have the freedom to speak as she desires, however, Dolly poignantly pinpoints the problem when she suddenly wishes

[837] Franklin, 'Where Do We Go From Here?', in *Ensuring Inequality*, 236.

'for a sharp, cruel knife to cut through the insidiously spreading web of fantasy in which Rosie was caught' (195). Furthermore, Dolly now understands that Rosie's 'grasp on economic solvency' is 'tenuous at best'.[838]

Ironically, and in a reversal of prescribed socio-political positions, the past excesses and the grand lifestyle of the former white inhabitants of Rosie's house, echo through the house as they are resurrected by the newly installed black resident. Rosie excitedly rearranges her array of 'brilliant ruby and emerald ceramic ash trays' as she contemplates the type of 'live dog' that the living room needs (199). As Dolly recognises the spiritual sickness overrunning Rosie's life, then Queenie realises how this new financial fantasy occurs in order to mask an austere and yet honest past. If, as Macke and Morgan contend, 'black daughters probably acquired their mothers' values and preferences *and* their mothers' belief that the preferences cannot be achieved'[839], then Rosie is on a mission to revert to the argument that black women have a decided 'lack of freedom' with only expectations of 'economic hardship'.[840]

Such expectations are provisionally halted when Rosie and Larnie begin to live together which continues to illustrate many facets of an African American community:

> Back on the avenue there had been many stranger living arrangements than mere couples who were not married. Married women who kept their maiden names, single women with several married names and men to match, husbands who mysteriously disappeared while children just as mysteriously appeared. (218)

[838] Hill, 'Black Families: Beyond Revisionist Scholarship', in *Black Intimacies*, 82.
[839] Macke and Morgan, 'Maternal Employment, Race, and Work Orientation of High School Girls', 199.
[840] Macke and Morgan, ibid.

Barbara Christian explains how these ambiguities and complexities are as much a part of the governing society's attitude toward motherhood and black womanhood as they are a part of interior configurations of the African American community.[841] Furthermore, this is a politically changing community; it is a neighbourhood that reflects the wider issues of segregation and its diminishing effects on the colour divide, of how 'the last embattled white families…holding out against the steady swarm of Negroes who were cheerfully settling in on all sides' (220). However, as the black families feel a sense of attainment in their new homes, Larnie feels a sense of diminished masculinity as he remains unsure of his role in a household of strong-minded women, this 'mini-gynocentric world'[842] of family politics. Larnie's past sensitivity has no place in this female scheme of things and Dolly reflects how 'It would have been better…if he were barefoot and arrogantly picking his teeth' (221). Images of Brownfield Copeland prevail; however, Larnie is a 'modern' black man struggling to find his place in Rosie's life within which the allotted roles become confused and further complicated as Larnie's earnings lessen as Rosie continues to work. Early suggests that such issues stem from the lack of a father figure in the house, and more importantly, that this 'enables Rosie to assume' such a role.[843] Larnie lashes out on one occasion that appears to force Rosie into a subordinate situation; however, his apology soon reinstates Rosie to her dominant position in the family. Rosie's femininity is ultimately questioned when Dolly wonders how Rosie could ever lead 'a normal woman's life with Larnie or any other man…Impossible that those narrow

[841] Barbara Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 221.
[842] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 437.
[843] Early, ibid., 436.

hips would ever bear a child, or that this slender patience could ever carry the responsibility for another life' (224).

Pregnancy and Black Motherhood

> Abortions will not let you forget.
> You remember the children you got that you did not get,
> The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair,
> The singers and workers that never handled the air.
> You will never neglect or beat
> Them, or silence or buy a sweet
> You will never wind up the sucking-thumb
> Or scuttle off ghosts that come
> You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,
> Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother eye.[844]

The tense relations return in an emotive scene between Queenie and Rosie that exemplifies the relationships of mothers and daughters in parallel to issues of child care and wider notions of familial and communal assistance. Queenie lifts 'the lid of the waste bin of the past. Rosie did not want to see what was inside' (233). Rosie's father left through Lourinda's doing and as a result of this Queenie knew that she had to be tough on Rosie. This embodies differing notions of motherhood. Lourinda's over-interference in Queenie's life has led to Queenie having to raise a child alone. Christian writes that white society respects motherhood as a wholesome and hallowed position and akin to African religions, fortifies this hypothesis with religion and myth.[845] Alternatively, it

[844] Gwendolyn Brooks, *Selected Poems* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 4.
[845] Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 31-32.

penalises single mothers for being mothers. By consigning all care and accountability of the child to individual mothers rather than to society, it limits women at every level.[846]

The classic model of the 'angel of the home'[847] initiates enormous paradoxes for the black mother who typically has to have a job external to the household so as to survive. Additionally, the perception of strength, a feminine characteristic in African culture, is permeated in 'white' American society with unwomanly implications. As black women endeavoured to subsist within the extremes of these oppositions, an additional conflict arises, for the black mother is symbolised as tough and is consequently reproved. Although revered for her potency, she is also criticised for being a matriarch, equally outside and inside the black community. These contradictions reflect Moynihan's myth of the 'black matriarch' that camouflages the African American mother's subjection, chastising her for the phenomenal attempts she makes, punishing her if she cannot make them.[848]

Queenie has done the best that she could considering the circumstances under which she lived and it is to her that Rosie turns when she decides to have an abortion (238). After going through such a dreadful back-street ordeal with Queenie by her side, Hunter then follows with a narrative contrast of a series of mother and daughter togethernesses. Just as Audre Lorde and her mother Linda clashed, there were moments of closeness that are mirrored in *God Bless the Child.* Queenie brushes Rosie's hair and they talk secretively together forcing Larnie into feeling an 'interloper' (240). This juxtaposition serves to emphasise the fact that a mother has aided a daughter's termination of a baby and possibly this knowledge is what drives Queenie to

[846] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 221.
[847] Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 31-32.
[848] Robert Staples, *The Black Woman in America* (Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall Inc., 1973), 27-28.

determinedly insist that Rosie tell Larnie. 'You let her kill my baby?', he demands of Queenie which elicits a verbal and physical tirade from Rosie concluding with the simple comment, '*Your* baby. I've killed my baby' (242).

As Christian describes, the African American birth rate has been seen as a hindrance to be observed cautiously and supervised carefully. In the eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin was concerned that the existence of a substantial population of blacks may imperil the moral fibre of white colonial communities.[849] Throughout slavery black children were considered as having economic value thus making a commodity out of black motherhood.[850] By the Great Depression, the birth rate was halved with evidence suggesting that socio-political forces played a part in controlling poor black communities.[851] More significantly, issues of birth control in the early twentieth century were imbued with concepts of eugenics, the principal ideology being 'more children from the fit, less from the unfit'.[852] By 1932, the 'Eugenics Society' claimed that no less than twenty states had approved laws on compulsory sterilisation and a year later the 'Birth Control Federation of America' openly organised a 'Negro Project'.[853] They asserted:

> The masses of Negroes, particularly in the South, still breed carelessly and disastrously, with the result that the increase among Negroes, even more than among whites, is from the portion of the population least fit, and least able to rear children properly.[854]

[849] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 222.
[850] Christian, *Black Women Novelists*, 5-8.
[851] Staples, *The Black Woman in America*, 135.
[852] Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 209-215.
[853] Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*, 222.
[854] Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, 214.

Angela Davis discloses how by the 1970s cases of sterilisation on 'unfit' black women from deprived areas had occurred without their consent and when placed adjacent to substandard health care, inferior housing and higher rates of infant mortality, it becomes obvious how issues of reproductive rights become paramount for black women.[855]

Rosie's assertion that she has terminated *her* baby exemplifies the insistence on her *own* reproductive rights. Considering the history of imposed black population control, Hunter embodies such issues through Rosie's predicament. Rosie's choice reflects her preferred lifestyle and she continues to re-apply 'the mask of glamour…false everything – industriously decorating an abyss' (242). Physically, spiritually and emotionally empty but ready to go to the ball, Rosie will again re-live her childhood Cinderella fairy-tale, however, this time, the truth will be that 'in the morning, these gorgeous costumes [will] turn to rags. It was all a mirage, a cruel fake, but Rosie…believed in it' (245). This belief further enhances Rosie's 'self-destructive bent'.[856]

Epiphanies

The ball proves to be an event of varying magnitudes; however, it is afterwards that proves the most emotionally challenging – Queenie is dead (251). The loss is palpable. Life continues with both Larnie and Rosie working in Benny's bar. The difference for Larnie, unlike Rosie, is the self-realisation of the degenerating properties of the street and its dubious characters: 'Larnie knew that his once easy, gentle nature was slowly being reshaped into something black and mean' (260). He feels that he is falling prey to 'a

[855] Davis, ibid., 214-216.
[856] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 433.

street culture demanding toughness…to aggressive forms of masculinity'.[857] This dawning awareness leads him to quit his job and walk free from the premises.

For Rosie, her personal demons are laid to rest at her mother's funeral: 'having made peace with Mom, she no longer needed to be angry with anyone else' (263). Furthermore, observation demonstrates to Rosie the hypocrisy of her world, of the people sitting in her house unable to listen to the truth, the truth about Queenie, the 'automatic lies' that were spoken on occasions such as these (261). Church is worse with its 'bland poisonous syrups poured over the truth of what her mother had been' (261). Queenie had not been a 'flat, one dimensional' character, 'someone rolled over by a steamroller'; she was 'far more resilient and more *rounded* than that'.[858] Hunter emphasises this insistence on seeing an individual as more than just a victim by 'allowing' Rosie to bring closure to the event by getting up early, ignoring frantic signals for her to remain.

Home brings little spiritual respite as the sentimental vision of Rosie sitting by the Christmas tree perusing the presents that her mother would never see is drawn sharply into focus with the arrival of the postman and final demands for payment. In addition, a phone call alerts Rosie to the fact that she must pay out a large and unaffordable sum in her gambling racket. This scene amalgamates Allen's four system levels ranging from the microsystem to the macrosystem and for Rosie the impact will be devastating. Additionally, Allen argues that major stress should be placed on 'the interconnectedness occurring not only within, but also between the different system levels'.[859] Thus, Queenie's death affects Rosie's immediate setting which is juxtaposed with her financial problems stemming from the Avenue, a masculine and restrictive place that embodies

[857] Hill, 'Socializing Black Children: The Impact of Social Class', in *Black Intimacies*, 149.
[858] Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 86.
[859] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 580.

wider social organisation. This brings Rosie and the reader back to Benny and his reminder that Rosie did not play her role, she did not accept her place in the scheme of things, admitting that even he is a mere 'cog in The Machine' (266). 'The Machine' represents the financially and politically powerful white male individuals who invisibly govern the country. This patriarchal supremacy is beyond Rosie's 'power to understand' until she visualises God's tugging at the strings of mere mortals such as herself and even Benny, realising that she had been 'played' from the very beginning of her involvement with gambling (267). As Early correctly states, 'Rosie is victimized by weak men, undone by her own ambition in a world where men will not accept such drive on the part of women'.[860]

When Rosie returns home, Hunter narratively parallels Rosie's new-found socio-political understanding with a dawning realisation of Lourinda's reality. Granny gives Rosie the last item of her treasured white family, the last thing given on her final day, a broken and tarnished cameo:

> [Rosie] turned it over in her hand…She wanted badly to believe that it was priceless treasure, but she could not prevent her knowing eyes from assessing it as worthless, cast-off junk…A horribly humorous thought crossed her mind then. Probably all the things Granny had ever brought home were junk. (269)

Rosie's awakening consciousness metamorphoses into verbal self-castigation, as she suddenly feels 'stupid', a 'jerk' for having believed the myth she herself created (270). Earlier critics such as Gladys Williams have asserted that Rosie is 'an incredible

[860] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 425.

amalgam of mother and grandmother'[861]; however, Early argues that Rosie's acceptance of her grandmother's 'aped gentility' and 'bourgeois manners' results from the conflict with her mother: 'it does not produce the conflict. Rosie turns to her grandmother as a way of getting back' at Queenie.[862] There is another aspect to both these rather simplified assumptions. Sociological theory states that family units are considered as 'traversing several developmental stages from their initial organization to their ultimate disintegration in divorce or physical death'.[863] The relationships are fraught and fought out between Rosie, Queenie and Lourinda because they fail to acknowledge that 'associated with each state in the family life cycle are distinct family tasks and resources to accomplish these tasks'.[864] There is no mutual sense of 'higher quality relationships' or 'exchange' of 'financial, practical, and emotional assistance'.[865] There is a subtle textual element of Rosie now paying the price of her chosen lifestyle, a degree of moral didacticism directed at young black women from 'The Machine'. Consequently, the reader must consider the complex and often subtle interconnectedness of how the individual subject must learn to comprehend the 'dialectical interrelations of…groups, classes and societies and their interpenetration at different levels of social reality'[866], in order to successfully survive.

A marriage proposal from Larnie may appear sentimental, but illustrates the fact that he wants to commit, unlike the stereotype of the strutting and striving black man. Additionally, with Larnie, Rosie need not utilise her sexuality in order to identify her

[861] Gladys Margaret Williams, 'Blind and Seeing Eyes in the Novel, *God Bless the Child*', *Obsidian*, 1 (1975), 18-26 (20).
[862] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 432.
[863] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 580.
[864] Allen, ibid.
[865] Lye, 'Adult Child-Parent Relationships', 86.
[866] Allen, 'African American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 581.

femininity through any association with a black man so as to determine feelings of autonomy. This is unlike Queenie who had such low self-esteem that she deemed any personal happiness dependent on male attention.[867] A small post-wedding party is organised with Dolly an invited member of the proceedings. Larnie now occupies the more dominant position in Rosie's life having subliminally replaced Lourinda. To reinforce this, Hunter replaces Lourinda in her former domestic and servile role in her own home. Early contends that Hunter illustrates that in 'modern American society, this mini-gynocentric world achieves a sense of balance…only when someone in it assumes a traditionally conceived male role'[868]; however, this argument fails, when one considers the demise of this particular family even with Larnie at the helm.

Akin to 'The House of Usher', the dream that is Rosie's house figuratively fractures as it is put up for sale to pay her debts. Correspondingly, Rosie's health worsens, her body pumped full of sedatives that gives way to hallucinations. In a further connection to the past, Rosie awakens screaming for her mother to find a cockroach scuttling over her bed-clothes: 'she turned back and contemplated her old friend. You sure followed me a long way…How come you like coloured people so much, anyway?' (283). It has taken so many mistakes for her to become conscious of the fact that she did not need all the paraphernalia and 'white' trappings in order to feel secure. Thus Rosie goes on a frenzy of smashing dishes and moving from room to room thinking 'about her life' hearing receding 'tinkling laughter' realising that the 'party' had ended (284). Remembering the cockroach, Rosie again sees the decay and signs of scars and cracks everywhere thus begging the question, '*Did rich white people have roaches too?*':

[867] Early, 'Working Girl Blues: Mothers, Daughters, and the Image of Billie Holiday', 429.
[868] Early, ibid., 435.

> Rosie really did laugh, from the top of her voice to the bottom, a full free laugh that echoed through all the rooms. Yes, maybe they did have roaches, and termites, too, and dandruff, and tooth decay, and falling hair…Rosie sat down weakly on the steps, undone at last by her own cosmic laughter. The joke was on her. (285)

Finally, Rosie's voice fills the 'white' rooms, a black female empowered voice that now realises that there are not as many racial differences as she was taught previously. Such narrow characterisation is further understood by Dolly who also realises at the novel's conclusion that 'it is a mistake to think of Rosie as a romantic tough'.[869] Rosie is an individual, rather than an exemplar of her gender or race; she is a character based on someone Hunter knew and had met.[870] Thus, using Allen's 'encompassing perspective' on personal development is useful.[871] He states that 'it is necessary to emphasize…that…within a single investigation' it is 'neither necessary nor possible to' assess a race, a class or a gender with the evidence given.[872] There are too many variables and causal factors in one person's downfall: 'poverty, health care, education, media, childcare – responsibilities of the African American community'.[873] These are all issues broached by *God Bless the Child.* Thus, Hunter, along with Lorde, Baldwin, Petry, Childress, Walker and Morrison, illuminate the fundamental nature of diverse individuals and how they function and fit within African American family units and communities. These writers illustrate not only obvious characteristics but also subtle variations parallel to mid-twentieth-century American cultural and political history.

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[869] Early, ibid., 430.
[870] Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 82.
[871] Allen, 'American Family Life in Societal Context: Crisis and Hope', 582.
[872] Allen, ibid., 582-584.
[873] Allen, Ibid., 587.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined seven African American writers with the intention of critically investigating the chosen texts, their cultural contact and consequent depiction of character. I have sought to address the following three over-arching questions:

1. In what alternate ways do African American life-writing and fictional narratives, that were written in or represent 1940-1970, articulate sexuality, same-sex relationships against the effect of the dominant social/political/cultural discourses?
2. In what manner, and with what consequence, do these authors enable the emergence of stories of interracial, marital and intergenerational relationships regarding legal and social issues?
3. In what ways have childhood, maturation, traumatic and often sexualised experiences been inscribed and framed in fiction by African American female writers in the mid-twentieth-century?

With regard to the first question, Audre Lorde and James Baldwin have been my main focus in order to answer how they articulate sexuality, same-sex relationships against the effect of the dominant social/political/cultural discourses. Lorde in particular employs elements of the surreal in her self-styled 'biomythography', *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* by integrating dream-like sections within her wider personal and historical narrative. This broader narrative of her childhood and young adult life in the 1940s and 1950s depicts her journey toward an accepted sexuality and lesbian identity parallel to

American political and cultural history. Lorde purposefully elevates her peripheral position as a black lesbian within this larger focus, thus re-positioning the marginalised individual within the dominant white culture. It is this elevation of the individual that makes this text innovative and worthy of main-stream evaluation and not the relegation into the narrow categorisation of lesbian literature that it has endured. I have similarly examined this text alongside the political atmosphere of mid-twentieth-century America so as to equally insist that this creative piece of life-writing be investigated anew. As my first chapter argues, Lorde's personal journey of self-discovery, her familial, sexual and interracial relationships in *Zami* fill the socio-political spaces created by a white Anglo-American culture that makes invisible those who fail to function and fit into 'normal' society.

Alternatively, James Baldwin's two fictional narratives depict the individual deaths of Rufus in *Another Country* and Giovanni in *Giovanni's Room* so as to textually challenge social and cultural heterosexist conventions. Baldwin chose to create a white only cast of characters in *Giovanni's Room* which displays his determination to not be considered merely a black author writing about black concerns but also shows how sexuality traverses racial boundaries. I argue in chapter two that environment also has an impact upon the individual and this can be seen in the ways that Rufus, Giovanni and David become enveloped and (for the two former characters) subsumed by the community and society they inhabit. These environments involve physical spaces and cultural places that have a major influence over our lives; and while beliefs can change over time, our physical environment can be considered a continual monument to society's control and power.

Thus both Baldwin and Lorde articulate sexuality (with particular reference to same-sex relationships) against the effect of social/political/cultural discourses. This is done in different ways but paradoxically with similar consequences regarding how such discourses impact upon the *individual.* Baldwin and Lorde depict such effects, not, in the first instance, upon a sub-culture or ethnic group, but upon the individual regardless of gender, race or class. Both authors illustrate this through their crossing of geographical borders, from Mexico to New York to Paris. This liberates both texts and authors from being categorised as African Americans writing African American issues and opens up their respective narratives to readers of any colour.

My second avenue of inquiry asks in what manner, and with what consequence, do these authors enable the emergence of stories of interracial, marital and intergenerational relationships regarding legal and social issues. Both Lorde and Baldwin depict interracial relationships; however, this issue is not the primary concern of either author. Therefore, in order to answer this second question I have concentrated on Ann Petry's *The Narrows* and Alice Childress's play *Wedding Band*, both texts relatively under-examined. Alice Walker's *Grange Copeland* intersects with the second and the third question relating to trauma, however, Petry and Childress poignantly illustrate interracial issues and relating cultural concepts.

Petry's aim at the end of her narrative is to offer hope that some of the wounds inflicted on the African American community may heal. This is achieved through the introspective and retrospective perspectives of her two main protagonists Abbie Crunch and Link Williams. Their internal monologues depict the impact of a wide-spread socio-cultural unacceptance of Link's relationship with Camilo and the final tragic, racially

motivated murder of Link. Through Abbie, Petry demonstrates the necessity of conceiving and believing that autonomy is a basic human right despite the colour of one's skin. Petry utilises and combines historical elements of racial stereotyping with the ideals of the 1950s' 'American Dream' so as to locate this black community of The Narrows within American society in order to conclude that individual race and class consciousness must transform and adjust. The intraracial theme successfully achieves a cross-cultural discourse that argues that although cultures may alter and adjust concerning an ethnic group's societal situation, there is, nonetheless, an internal deficiency regarding commonality and unity among group members. I argue that *The Narrows* reveals such difficulties and drawbacks and consequently asserts that communal racial discord must not be the case.

Childress's play and main protagonist Julia Augustine illustrates the discovery of a black female discourse and mode of resistance. My main aim in this chapter is to relocate *Wedding Band* within the genre of mid-twentieth-century African American women's writing because this play has been sadly under-examined as a result of more politically motivating plays of the 1960s such as Baraka's *Dutchman.* It is my contention that by locating her characters in 1918 South Carolina, Childress's 1966 play depicts the ongoing contemporaneous attitudes toward interracial relationships and is thus political in essence. Childress's characters collectively perform communal acts, but this requires individual acts that challenge persistent humiliations and indignities of racism. Only when Julia discovers her sense of self does she become capable of forming meaningful relations with her fellow women. These women similarly have to overcome their own prejudices in order to formulate a more positive black female community. Through these

characters Childress shows how defiance can be produced in innumerable and seemingly immaterial ways, and that the primary significance is to uphold a critical and unstinting gaze of resistance toward the traditional and contemporary constructions of oppression.

Alice Walker and her first novel *Grange Copeland* portrays similar issues of racial awareness as seen through Julia, however, for Ruth Copeland, this is achieved after a series of tragic events. It is predominantly through this lens that I examine Walker's narrative so as to broach the question: in what ways have childhood, maturation, traumatic and often sexualised experiences been inscribed and framed in fiction by African American female writers in the mid-twentieth-century?

Walker portrays black communal life and its prevailing customs in her works; however, this is in order to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of community and all its prevailing individual components and characters. Telling the 'truth' of their lives involves what Walker identifies as writing the missing parts, of highlighting uncomfortable issues of marital violence and murder as in *Grange Copeland*. Within black narratives these gaps or omissions are largely signified by what she identifies as general inauthentic representations of black women. Thus Walker creates the history of one family with the main depiction of the early childhoods and maturation of both a father and a daughter. This is in order to illustrate that despite hardships and trauma, an individual *can* survive whole. Brownfield Copeland does not, but his daughter Ruth offers a positive future; Walker succinctly links this with the contemporary issue of civil rights. As readers we finish *Grange Copeland* with the genuine wish that Ruth has the aptitude, in spite of the absence of black female role 'models', to intellectually and spiritually develop; that with unconditional familial love, she will achieve what Walker

describes as ‘survival whole’. In exploring these concepts of maturation and through close textual analysis, my aim has been to argue and demonstrate that my chosen authors alter the way in which the self and subjectivity can be discerned. These writers offer pioneering ways of viewing personal identity, family and community through their denial of historicised stereotypes and traditional cultural convictions. Thus, they change the face of mid-twentieth-century expectations about the lives of African American individuals.

In a similar way to Petry, Morrison debunks stock historicised stereotypes, but where Petry destabilises images of black women, Morrison chooses to undermine white icons such as Shirley Temple. This is in order to successfully reposition the black female in her fiction and to challenge the reader to reassess the power of culturally prescribed concepts of beauty through the eyes of younger black members of society. These younger members are Morrison’s focus, a concentration that I argue transcends race through the depiction of the rape of a daughter by her father. For Pecola Breedlove, this trauma elicits a primitive defensive manoeuvre that is applicable to all victims of sexual abuse. The reaction to the trauma is to forestall the oncoming psychological disorientation and possible disintegration by creating an individual and particular form of internalisation. For many this means verbal silence with regard to the telling of the abuse or for Pecola, the formation of a ‘best friend’. The psychological work of dealing with the incident is suspended, thus denying the reintegration of mind, body and soul. *The Bluest Eye* highlights the plight of the peripheral character, most specifically, the vulnerable child and the victim of abuse.

The theme of the vulnerable child is seemingly reversed in *God Bless the Child* and its female protagonist Rosie Fleming. Initially, her childhood and parenting is one that

aims to ‘toughen’ up this little black girl. However, along with a misogynistic and prejudiced environment, such negative socialisation serves to undermine Rosie both physically and emotionally. Kristin Hunter highlights the difficulties of single parenting, the complexities of intergenerational relationships and thus discredits many theories regarding the black family. Again, along with the other authors analysed in this thesis, Hunter defies conventional thought concerning black relationships and this is done through the concentrated perspective of the individual. Rosie is not merely an exemplar of her gender or race, and thus her character illustrates, as Walter Allen argues, that it is neither essential nor feasible to assess a race, a class or a gender in such a narrow way. There are too many variables and causal factors in one person’s life and unfortunate downfall: poverty, health care, education, media, childcare as well as the positive and negative contribution of the African American community. Thus Hunter, along with Lorde, Baldwin, Petry, Childress, Walker and Morrison illuminate the nature of miscellaneous individuals and how they function and fit within African American family units and communities; or not as the case may be.

Critical attention has continually ‘racialised’ issues of sexuality, violence, abuse and trauma, seldom appreciating the psychological effects of rape, death and familial disintegration and often turning such consequences into metaphors for wider racial, cultural concepts. Thus such critical focus has totally abandoned the individual and the child. This thesis aims to readdress such concerns and demonstrate that authors such as Lorde, Baldwin and Morrison transcend the boundaries of race gender and class where homosexuality and physical abuse are concerned. Furthermore, the individual must be re-considered as an important site of investigation, for otherwise, it makes the broader

traditional exploration of community and ‘race’ futile. Most importantly, the previously undervalued position of the child *must* be considered, for with acceptance and acknowledgment of one’s past there is a chance of positive development and to potentially flourish as an adult.

This thesis has examined relationships in all their aspects; these same-sex, interracial, heterosexual, marital, parental and intergenerational associations all offer genuine insights into the complex nature of life despite being expressed in a predominantly fictional manner. These texts demand that there must be acceptance and recognition of heterogeneity which accordingly prompts the need for a discourse that moves and metamorphoses accordingly with the prevailing political/economic/societal/cultural attitudes of one’s moment in time. Any discursive pattern that remains static will only become stagnant and basically reverse any positive merits it may have initially contained. Thus all theory, criticism, and social commentary are of their respective periods in history and must be utilised carefully so as to not repeat the same historical mistakes. Thus new avenues of inquiry must be explored. Utilising theories and methods such as cultural geography, sociology and child development are the first steps toward incorporating more critical concepts into the field of literature.

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